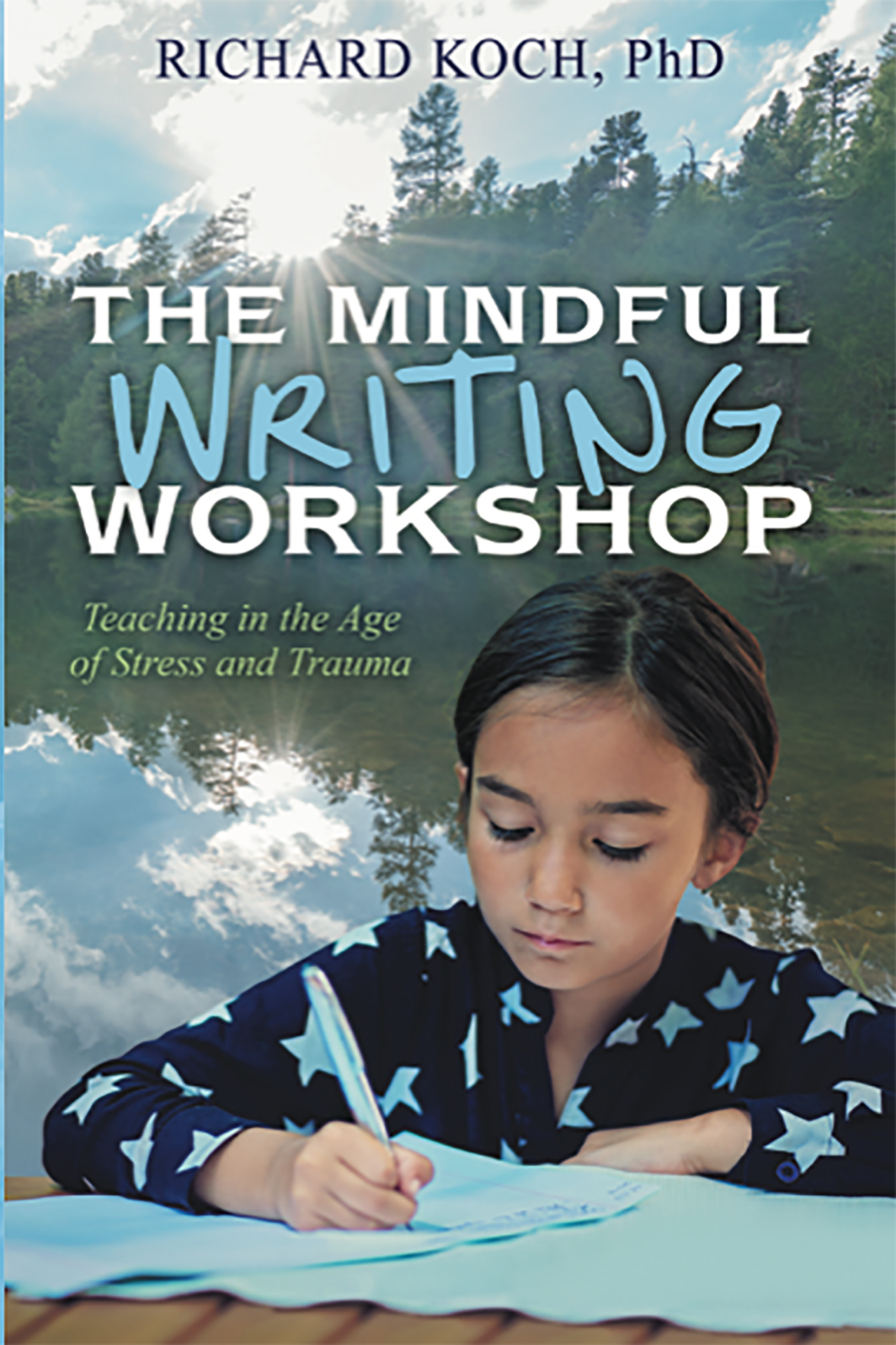
RICHARD KOCH, PhD

THE MINDFUL WRITING WORKSHOP

Teaching in the Age of Stress and Trauma



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Everyone has the potential to be more compassionate and loving …
—The Dalai Lama, in *The World Needs Your Kid*

For Laura, who brings in the light

And for Devon, Bethany, Emily, and John

In memory of Rosalie Avila, 2004–2017

CONTENTS

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Jean Petterson, with whom I cowrote a previous book, *The Portfolio Guidebook*, taught me how to work with elementary students. Jean had taught every level, K–8, and I was just a college teacher of writing as we began our twenty-year collaboration. I remember a five-year-old writer walking toward me, and me looking around to see "Where is Jean?" Our work became our friendship, and our friendship became one of the most important in my life. The scaffolding questions for helping students get reasons and examples for their arguments in Appendix A are among the many things Jean taught me and allowed me to adopt in my work.

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Teaching in the Age of Stress and Trauma

Osho's Core Values for Learning:

The Three Cs

Humanity has now come to a crossroads. We have lived the one-dimensional man, we have exhausted it. We need now a more enriched human being, the three-dimensional. I call them the three Cs, just like the three Rs—the first C is consciousness, the second C is compassion, the third C is creativity.

Consciousness is being, compassion is feeling, creativity is action. My vision of the new human being has to be all three simultaneously. I am giving you the greatest challenge ever given, the hardest task to be fulfilled. You have to be as meditative as a Buddha, as loving as a Krishna, as creative as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci. You have to be all together, simultaneously.

—Osho, *Creativity: Unleashing the Forces Within*

Reflection on Osho:

The three genres that were most promoted by the former common core (narrative writing, persuasion/argument, research/informational writing) are three key, authentic types of writing in the world. So, working to assist students with these types of writing is indeed a good idea. This book addresses how teachers can effectively focus on these three genres while still teaching from the most powerful method we know: a writing workshop.

However, this book also hopes to make a deeper commitment to goals such as those that Osho presents. Our world is experiencing urgent conditions—in pollution and deterioration of nature, in the harm caused by world and national poverty, and in our failure to fund and develop quality education for all of our children.

The children of a society are a sacred trust. They will become more *conscious* if we give them authentic, lifelike challenges to critically analyze their world—to consider different stakeholders and assess benefits and drawbacks. They will become more *creative* if we offer them opportunities to complete whole, meaningful projects that allow for choice—and if we help them strive for artistic quality through our coaching. Finally, we can cultivate a new generation of more *compassionate* citizens—perhaps the most important goal of all—if we help students to value other cultures and to respect the humanity of all people, and if we remember that people learn compassion by being treated compassionately.

CHAPTER 1

Why a Mindful, Trauma-Sensitive Writing Workshop?

Love is the presence of conflict with commitment to work through it.

—Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade

INTRODUCTION

The story of twenty-first-century education is surely still to be written. It could be a story of struggle between what we say we want and what we as a nation are willing to provide. It could be a tale of horror revealing the harm we do by being harsh instead of helping to students in need. It could be a dystopian narrative contrasting opportunities dreamt of under the umbrella of John Dewey with ravages brought by the storms of testing and inequity. Or it could be a mystery about whether, in our busy, preoccupied lives, we will honor the sacredness of our own children.

Let's write the next part of this story together. Let's blink back our hurt, wherever it comes from, and bring our deepest impulse of kindness to the table. Let's offer students scaffolding instead of judgment. Let's look at the world's past intolerance of difference and respond with nurturing for all learners, who may grow mercy for others in our future. Let's write this story of twenty-first-century education together, and let's make it the story of our perseverance and love.

Where do we start? We can start by putting necessary things first. Mindful teaching begins with noticing the needs of learners. As a forest ranger's son, I spent much of my childhood with woods and wildlife. I saw that creatures as different as the deer and wolf share similar struggles—for safety and nourishment. These are fundamental human needs as well. I believe learners will invariably rise to learning when it is offered in a safe environment that nourishes.

I am excited to offer you the writing workshop lessons contained in this book. I have used them with large numbers of students at various levels over a number of years. I have taught them to large numbers of teachers for use in their own classrooms.

With these approaches, I see previously passive or distracted students become engaged, increase their effort, deepen their resilience, and soon raise the quality of their writing. I see previously worried teachers become eager to get back to their students to offer the lessons I have demonstrated. Later, I hear those same teachers' expressions of pleasure and satisfaction when their students respond with energy and a striving toward new skills. The craft lessons you will receive here can, when applied in your classroom, both ignite students' energy and also help them achieve higher quality writing performance.

However, there are two fundamental challenges facing writing workshop teachers today that have little to do with the quality of craft lessons

available. And this book will help you with those challenges also. The first can be stated in relation to our students. In short, these are not your mother or father's classrooms of learners. They are not inferior to former students—as is so often believed. They are not disinterested in learning, as may seem to be the case at certain classroom moments. Rather, the difference between past and present most acutely is that these students are growing up in the age of stress and trauma. And this has changed them.

So many students have been harmed by traumatic events at early ages or by the time they reach adolescence. So many students lead lives of sustained trauma—abuse or neglect in the home, danger and violence in the neighborhood, bullying at school, homelessness, food insecurity, and more. Parents living in poverty often cannot provide for their children in the ways they might deeply wish to.

The second related problem is how schools are not connecting to the needs of this new group of students. Given the age of stress and trauma that the students are coming from, it is all the more disturbing that we, as a society, have chosen this moment in learning history to inappropriately provide, through high-stakes testing and the test prep that accompanies it, what could be called a meaningless, high-stress curriculum. The test-prep, high-anxiety school has no actual life meaning for students. It does not make students feel safe. It does not nourish. And it does not connect to their desire to learn.

Further, many students living in this age of trauma have been impacted so that they respond to these meaningless, high-pressure situations with the characteristic trauma responses—fight, flight, or freeze. When a student, seemingly for small reasons, lashes out with anger at a teacher or peer, when a student engages in high rates of absenteeism (or emotional distraction), and when a student sits passively and unresponsively in relation to classroom demands, these are most often not truly signs that the student does not desire to learn. Rather, these are signs of a student responding emotionally, not intellectually, to an environment that, on some level, replicates other trauma in their lives. These are responses born of fear.

In the article "Why Schools Need to Be Trauma Informed," Barbara Oehlberg explains: "Although schools are not mental health facilities and teachers are not therapists, teaching today's students requires alternative strategies and skills compared to what worked a generation ago" (2008, 1).

Educators have often lived in denial of the role of student trauma in their classroom world (Craig, 2016). As I will explain in a moment, there are abundant statistics showing the prevalence of trauma experience in stu-

dents' lives. However, I think most educators would believe—on the face of it—that children today often lead tough lives, with significant trauma included. So, why the absence in school of a response to trauma?

I believe this absence has been due to three reasons. First, as I suggested above, the school environment—or context—for the past twenty years has been one of growing emphasis on high-pressure testing companioned with fewer and fewer funds and resources being directed to schools. This has created such a traumatic environment for teachers that it has left them scrambling—and scrambling toward the wrong goals at that, toward implementing test prep rather than best practices for learning, and toward pressuring students to "achieve" narrowly as test takers rather than meeting students' overall needs as learners.

Second, educators may have been unaware that they can do something to help students who have experienced trauma. This helping approach, they feared, would necessitate becoming therapists in addition to teachers—or, at the very least, it would require spending extra time on teaching, whereas they were already working overtime. And third, teachers have guessed that pausing to assist students who have experienced trauma would necessarily slow learning down for others and lead to lowering of academic standards in the classroom.

Thanks to Oehlberg and others, we now know that teachers do not need to become therapists to become powerful in their classrooms at helping students who have experienced trauma. It turns out that the workshop classroom, with limited but essential tuning, can be just the environment students in the grip of trauma need in order to become comfortable in themselves and to then break through into active learning. Further—and this may be the best part—what I am calling the "tuned" workshop classroom is also what is needed to move all learners forward most effectively. It serves all learners best.

The Current Condition

Jane Ellen Stevens summarized the current state of trauma in schools like this:

> After Washington State did its own statewide survey of the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences, it calculated that in a public school classroom of 30 students, more than half were exposed to physical abuse or adult-on-adult violence in their homes or neighborhoods (Anda & Brown, 2010). This is not unique to Washington State; because of the prevalence of childhood adversity, you can find the same issues in any state and city in the United States. (Stevens, Craig, 2016, ix)

Indeed, national statistics make clear that the prevalence of stress among young people is "not unique to Washington State." In 2011, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, 6.2 million children experienced child abuse. Further, "the National Survey of Children's Exposure to Violence reports … in a nationally representative sample of 4,549 children aged 0–17.2[,] more than half (60.6%) of the sample experienced or witnessed victimization in the past year." Of those, 46.3 percent experienced physical assault (2016).

Among additional risk factors for young people are being female, parental psychopathology, and low social support. Indications are that conditions overall may be getting worse, rather than better for children. National Public Radio reported, for example, that the number of homeless students has doubled in the last decade, now numbering 1.3 million (June 13, 2016).

Stevens elaborates the results of this stress: "In a nutshell … research shows that the toxic stress of trauma can damage children's brains, making it impossible for them to learn; punitive school discipline policies just further traumatize them" (viii).

There is bad news and good news for educators with respect to this current condition:

> These experiences alter the architecture of children's brains in ways that threaten their ability to achieve academic and social competence (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 2012). … But the news is not all bad. Brain development turns out to be a very dynamic process that retains a certain plasticity or capacity to adapt throughout the human life span (National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2009). … With the right type of instruction and emotional support, traumatized children can regain their ability to achieve academic and social mastery.
>
> Regrettably, these new advances in neuroscience are not yet center stage in discussions of educational reform. (Craig, 1–2)

What Schools Can Do

It cannot be the purpose of this book to elaborate fully on how the brain and human function are damaged by trauma. However, we can take heart from brain researchers' assurance that the brain retains its plasticity throughout the human life span—we can know that healing practices have strong chances for success. And in this book I can clarify core principles of trauma-sensitive schools and how these core principles can be applied in a powerful writing workshop.

Students who have experienced trauma need caring and supportive teachers, and they need learning challenges to arrive accompanied by skill-

ful scaffolding that can help them succeed at the challenges (Craig, 61). They need for this to occur in a predictable and safe learning community. Making the steps of workshop predictable is something teachers have been working on for a while. Making the classroom discourse community consistently safe and supportive, we now see, is equally important.

Even though most teachers are probably trying to provide such a community, there has normally been little professional development on how to do so. If we study some of the best thinkers in discourse analysis, we may find ways to improve our teaching practice in this important area.

James Paul Gee, in *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*, explains that many people have felt that when they engage in communication with others, they are mainly exchanging information. Gee argues that this is a false notion, that discourse is never neutral and is never just providing the facts—rather, it is constructing an environment for social interaction and creating scaffolding for certain social activities (Gee, 1999, 1).

We use language to make social things happen. And we use language to invite others into a certain kind of culture or community. Of course, there are better and worse cultures that we can construct (Gee, 2012, 8). I believe that, under the heavy burden of national testing—with its accompanying skewed teacher evaluations—teachers have often been provoked into discourse steps that do not successfully invite students into a learning culture.

Peter Johnston, in his book *Opening Minds: Using Language to Change Lives*, exemplifies Gee's point about language constructing environments in a short life moment story:

> One summer at a family reunion, I went to chat with two of my nieces, ages three and five, who were playing in the sandbox. As I sat down, they greeted me as follows:
>
> Amelia: Here's Uncle Peter. Let's play. I'll be the mother.
>
> Marie: Yeah, I'll be the little daughter. Uncle Peter can be your husband.
>
> Amelia: No. We're not married yet.

Johnston continues:

> This brief interaction captures for me something familiar about language and schooling. In seconds, with a handful of words, and with my relatively passive consent, the girls constructed a world in which we might live for a time—they decided who we would and would not be and what we would be doing. Classrooms are just like this. (1–2)

All over the country in classrooms everywhere, "with a handful of words," teachers construct communities of work for their students. Nothing is

more important to our students' learning than the type of culture and community we establish through this discourse. Thankfully, just as we do not need to become therapists to work effectively with trauma-informed practices, we also do not need to become discourse theorists to create the kind of "classroom talk" that can empower students forward with learning.

Three Traits of Trauma-Informed Practice

Coaching educators toward engaging, powerful, and healing teacher-student talk is the main purpose of this book—and will be part of the work of each chapter. However, I will offer fuller guidelines for achieving trauma-informed classroom discourse in chapters 2 and 3. For now, I want to clarify three additional classroom traits that Craig believes can lead to the blossoming of students who have experienced trauma: 1) engaging in what she calls "dialogic" teaching; 2) companioning that with an instructional approach that provides early opportunities for "doing" what is being talked about in the lessons; and 3) providing intentional and ambitious scaffolding for each lesson that can get students started and nurture them toward success.

Dialogic Teaching

Dialogic teaching recognizes the "power of conversation and dialogue to extend children's thinking and increase their understanding of things that they are learning. " We keep in mind that "Children with early trauma histories are often deprived of language rich home environments" (66).

According to Craig, "Dialogic teaching provides new opportunities for children to explore how language can be used to explore other people's ideas. This helps children expand their ability to use representational thought, a skill that is critical to the development of both empathy and inferential comprehension" (66).

Effective classroom practitioners of a writing workshop may realize from the above statements how naturally dialogic methods can be placed within the workshop environment. The interactive mini lesson can provide repeated opportunities for rich dialogue, and small group work focused on one another's writing and writing goals can lead to regular practice opportunities for exploring other people's ideas. However, in many workshop classrooms I have observed, pausing for dialogue or questions during the lesson and providing time to share and respond to writing have become minimized.

Also, the dialogue Craig is recommending, if it is to be fully successful, needs the foundation of the predictable and safe classroom discourse

environment. Chapter 3 is devoted to describing how to build that safe environment as part of your launch of a workshop in your classroom.

To touch on those issues briefly here, I offer two key elements that can assist teachers to offer trauma-sensitive guidance to the dialogic exchanges. First, "Specific praise about effort children expend working on difficult tasks makes children more aware of their capacity for persistence and effortful control" (Craig, 65).

Both the writing peer-response group and the teacher conference can easily include praise for effort, which is also recommended as help for all students by Johnston (*Opening Minds*). Carol Dweck, in an essay clarifying *Growth Mindset*, adds an additional dimension and understanding. Effort is not all we are seeking. We also wish for learning success. With this in mind, Dweck recommends praising effort but being sure to combine that with praise for trying new and additional strategies to solve the problem (Dweck, 2015, 1).

Second, effective responses within a dialogic environment can often be best learned within "scripted" language used to greet peers or to relate to peers in certain work settings (Craig, 79). In a workshop, the best practices we know for how to respond to others' writing include semi-scripted approaches that both assist the development of students who've experienced trauma and also guide all students toward a productive response to writing. I will provide a "positive response protocol" in chapter 3 intended to establish this approach.

Peer interaction in a partially scripted and carefully guided environment can provide the "predictable classroom routines … that help children know what to do and how to do it" (Craig, 65).

The "Doing" Classroom

With respect to constructing the "doing" classroom, Craig explains, "Neural networks are strengthened by use of an instructional format that gives children frequent opportunities to do something with what is being learned—talk about it with a peer, complete a hands-on activity, or draw a picture symbolizing what they have learned" (62). Craig adds that in preparation for this active doing, "Consideration is given to the three primary neural networks associated with learning: the recognition network, which is the 'what' of learning; the strategic network, which is the 'how' of learning; and the affective network, which is the 'why' of learning" (CAST, 2011, Craig, 63).

Classroom "doing" needs to occur interactively with the dialogic environment. When the doing occurs in a safe environment utilizing positive guidelines for interaction, "This … allows teachers to take a proactive approach that engages children in collaborative partnerships. Character-

ized by respect and mutuality, these partnerships help minimize the effects of trauma and prevent additional re-traumatization" (70).

Scaffolding

Students who have experienced trauma also need conscious and consistent scaffolding. Craig clarifies four types of scaffolding that help these students to succeed as "doers."

First, the teacher utilizes "think-alouds"—the teacher presenting her or his own thinking process out loud to students in relation to a task or goal that is being encountered by all. Because they audibly experience the teacher's approach to the task— and also visually experience, if the teacher is task-doing while talking—they get the opportunity to see both the rough-draft nature of this work stage and also the pattern they might follow. Students often derive a can-do attitude from the think-aloud. The think-aloud is powerful partly because it provides children "a window into [the teacher's] own problem-solving process" (71).

Second, it is important that teachers take a modeling approach. The think-aloud crystallizes for learners how the teacher would approach a task. Modeling extends that by having the teacher actually engage in as much of the task, and in as many task steps, as possible—to model commitment to process and to model how certain stages might look. Teacher modeling has long been known as an important method of the effective writing workshop. Craig affirms the importance of modeling, with this specific extension and clarification:

> Meaningful scaffolds include teacher modeling of goal-setting behaviors, as well as close collaboration with students as they create plans to meet personal goals. These include explicit feedback that is provided in a timely, informative manner, in addition to opportunities for children to reflect on their progress and performance. … [T]hese types of scaffolds … strengthen the prefrontal cortex, making children's executive functioning more effective and automatic. (64)

The third scaffolding feature of this "doing" environment calls for including "choice-making" as a consistent part of the student's world. Sometimes, the circumstance is open-ended and students can make entirely free choices. However, what successful workshop teachers know is that even choices made within parameters of more specific classroom tasks and goals can be powerful motivators for students. Perhaps an "argument" topic must be chosen, or perhaps a choice of writing topics must be made from characters or issues of a certain historical period. These choices within genres or within units of study nevertheless greatly empower students forward with motivation and purpose.

With respect to students who have experienced trauma, "Choice making is another way to foster this process of self-differentiation, especially when time is spent discussing whether the choices made help students achieve their personal goals" (Craig, 65). Of course, choice-making grows the individuality and responsibility of all learners.

Fourth, and finally, I want to comment on a type of scaffolding that is not part of every workshop classroom, but Craig believes it should be. The classroom connections to the world, and also the interactive practices within the classroom, must include the opportunity to help others. This purpose can be fulfilled on multiple levels and in a variety of ways. Craig discusses service learning as valuable for students who have experienced trauma. It is quite possible within a writing workshop to include service steps such as making presentations to public audiences or utilizing writing to propose public action steps, and so forth. However, constructing a caring and supportive peer-response environment can also provide steady opportunities to help others. Craig explains, "When children experience themselves as valuable members of their classroom community, they acquire new insights about their capacity to make positive changes in their lives" (72–73).

Equity and Culturally Sustaining Teaching

Some, and we could hope many, readers of this opening chapter may be thinking this work teachers can do to help heal students who have experienced stress and trauma is, in fact, an equity issue. I agree—it is. I am arguing here that the function of school is to meet the needs of the learner. When we offer a classroom approach and environment that treats all students the same, or that delivers the task and then expects that all students will approach the task in the same way with the same self-awareness, we are not meeting the goal of equity, which asks that we incorporate lessons, scaffolding, and coaching in an effort to provide what each learner needs in order to learn at their best.

Similarly, this trauma-informed work can be related to a commitment to utilize culturally sustaining teaching. As Geneva Gay has characterized it in her seminal book, *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, this approach begins by bringing the content of the student's culture into the classroom-learning content and also teaching each student to respect their own culture and the culture of others. Though some educators initially find this a daunting request, it is both doable and necessary. And Gay's book provides accessible examples of how to do this, including a kindergarten teacher who posts the word "Welcome" outside her door in a number of languages, including

all of the at-home languages of the children in her class. Gay also describes how this teacher includes books in her lessons that share positive information about each culture represented in the room (2018, 41–44). Duncan-Andrade and Morrell, in *The Art of Critical Pedagogy*, assert that to expect drastically underresourced schools to provide the same results as highly resourced schools is to not recognize we have set up something like "a rigged game of Monopoly" (Andrade and Morrell, 2008, 3). Similarly, to simply assign school tasks to all but not to provide the differing guidance and support for learning that different students might need is offering a "rigged" environment where only the already congruent, or culturally dominant, will thrive. Showing a student tangibly that we respect their race and culture is key in providing them an environment they feel safe in and nourished by.

Of course, this approach and concern relates to gender also. Simply being female is a risk factor for experiencing trauma in our society. This must change. We must construct classrooms and schools where girls and young women are safe from mysogyny and bullying, and where women role models and women's accomplishments are represented in their classrooms and in their educational content. These will be classrooms where the talents and learning capacities of girls and young women are respected equally with boys and young men. And this must not be a dream but a working practice. Further, LGBTQ students must be provided a safe and supported learning environment, and one that includes study of issues that face them, and examples of accomplishments of people like them. We will need to let go of the meaningless, high stakes, test-based curriculum that is so often provided by schools today. Easier said than done? We must still bravely do it.

I understand as I say these comments that teachers are people, like other workers, who generally need their jobs for their livelihood. I know teachers need to balance their bravery with the goal of maintaining employment. However, this must not be a reason to "dog paddle" in place—we must find meaningful ways to swim toward the destination. Perhaps a school organization or an after-school club can form? Perhaps we can wedge out a curricular space in the school day? Perhaps the teacher can make an argument at the grade level meeting or at the school board, an argument on behalf of utilizing powerful pedagogical practice? Or perhaps the teacher just teaches at certain points in ways she/he knows will be nurturing and growing for students, even if that path is not fully sanctioned by the school curriculum?

We know that the drastically unequal funding for schools is not by accident, but by race and class. And we know that the test-prep curriculum

serves tests that do not measure how well students will do in life, and that scoring high on these tests can often be most solidly correlated with family wealth. We know that tragically it is not rare for young girls and boys to be driven to suicide by bullying. And we know in terms of the classroom that many students are taught reading by being drilled over short, boring passages for which they are simply to name the main point. Studies show this type of teaching produces adults who have been alienated and who do not read. When you walk into a classroom where the teaching of reading looks more like the interrogation of a criminal than like the nurturing of a child, then we must act. Reading can be taught meaningfully and invitingly. Writing also can be taught with joy and authenticity, as this book will show.

We must be each other's allies as we take these steps, as Beverly Tatum explains (2008). There is a need to move forward with help and in community. Sometimes we may need not only to be each other's allies but also co-conspirators with one another to protest wrong practice and to advocate actively for change, and to "infiltrate" school with powerful teaching and learning, as Bettina Love suggests (2018). I am making an argument in this book for both growing students toward critical thinking and also for helping them develop the capacity to express themselves effectively and fully. By teaching students in ways that promote justice and caring in the classroom, we are also providing a framework that helps them to value a socially just and compassionate world.

Growing Body of Research on Trauma-Healing Practices

Research in related fields supports change in schools toward trauma-sensitive practices. This includes the ideas of leading trauma researchers such as Daniel J. Siegel, who, in a variety of works, has offered guidelines for helping those who've experienced trauma. In works like *Healing Trauma*, Siegel and his coauthor, Marion F. Solomon, highlight that "Understanding … the ongoing impact of *relationships* on neural and mental function can help us understand both the origin of risk following trauma and the necessary ingredients for prevention and intervention" (2003, xv, emphasis added). Siegel and Solomon study how relationships are often the cause of trauma, but how relationships are also key to preventing further traumatizing and key to helpful intervention for those who have been traumatized.

In Siegel's subsequent work on children and brain development, *The Whole Brain Child*, with coauthor Tina Payne Bryson, the authors explore what they call "implicit memory" and characterize that memories are neither factual nor objectively proportional. We do not simply remember

what occurred, and we do not necessarily remember most profoundly what occurred over the greatest period of time. Rather, our brain holds implicit memory, often based on the intensity of the experience and with respect to the positive or negative nature of the experience.

With reference to a young person's development, Siegel and Bryson write:

> If a piano teacher frequently criticizes his playing, [the child] may create a mental model that he doesn't like piano, or even that he's not musical. A more extreme version of this process occurs in the case of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, where an implicit memory of a disturbing experience becomes encoded in a person's brain, and a sound or image triggers that memory without the person even realizing it's a memory. (2011, 72)

Siegel and Bryson explain that this is how a natural brain function intended to keep us safe (the tendency when threatened to engage in fight, flight, or freeze) becomes an overly dominant function in which victims of trauma respond unreasonably to nearby stimuli—in the general world or in places like school.

Further, there are books in more specifically educational fields, such as *Girl Time* by Maisha T. Winn, which focuses on utilizing restorative justice for healing and on how both dialogic and experiential approaches help young women who have been incarcerated (2011). Similarly, *Expressive Arts Therapy for Traumatized Children and Adolescents* by Carmen Richardson, provides an example of work in art class that can more directly help those who've experienced trauma (2016). Both Winn's and Richardson's works are based on inviting those who've experienced trauma into inherently creative situations—situations in which they themselves are the actors, the doers. In Winn's work, the incarcerated females write, produce, and act the parts in plays authentic to their past and current experiences. In Richardson's study, children and adolescents create a wide range of artistic pieces, often with directly healing purposes—such as portraying the events of past experience and mapping the emotional content of those experiences.

Siegel's studies and conclusions about the potential for supplying restorative and healing memories to help children who have implicit memory banks of trauma are relevant to our pedagogical work. Winn's treatment of restorative justice through therapeutic "doing" is related to the issue of healing those in our workshop classrooms who've experienced trauma. And Richardson's study of approaching the content of trauma and healing through artistic representation is directly relevant to writing experiences that can be included in our school classrooms.

Though work with trauma-sensitive practices may sometimes seem complicated, Siegel's emphasis on the need for human support can serve as a beacon, showing us how to help. Winn explains that restoration and healing "are not [contained in] a program—nor even a 'Best Practice'—but occur through relationships we create" (2016). And Jeffrey Duncan-Andrade, whose statement on love also serves as epigraph to this chapter, concurs, reminding us that "The single biggest protective factor in a young person's life is a caring adult" (2016).

CHAPTER 2

Combining Quality and Compassion, Craft and Kindness: How to Use This Book

Surface emotions like anger, disappointment, and ego satisfaction are to be experienced and let go. Deep feelings of the heart like joy, love, and sorrow bring peace and reveal where conscience and intuition meet. These feelings must be kept with us and should guide our lives.

—Native American Shamanic Teaching (Kenneth Meadows, paraphrase)

What Is Mindfulness?

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." In older, simpler days, we said this as children in moments of receiving insult or rejection, hoping these self-protective words were true. We knew that physical attack could leave us harmed, for sure, but so could assault with words. Words wound under the skin, in ways that alter our psychology and our brain—and yet, in ways that may pass invisibly before others in a gathering. Words can wound so deeply that they leave us paralyzed beside the road, knocking our life dreams off course. When Anne Sexton, a Pulitzer Prize winning twentieth-century poet, was told at age eighteen by her teacher that her poems were just second-rate imitating of a published poet's work, Sexton didn't write again for ten years.

Thankfully, words can also support. They can let the other person know we see them and value them. They can invite others into a sisterhood and brotherhood of mutual concern, safety, and opportunity. Words can soothe the soul. Mindfulness toward others in our words and deeds can help us grow a healing and engaged classroom. But what exactly is mindfulness?

In *Meditation Is Not What You Think*, Jon Kabat-Zinn, who has written several books on this subject, says, "Mindfulness is synonymous with awareness." He proceeds to define it as "the awareness that arises from paying attention to purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally… in the service of wisdom, self-understanding, and recognizing our intrinsic interconnectedness with others and with the world, and thus, in the service of kindness and compassion" (2018, xxxiv). Kabat-Zinn talks about a "deep inhabiting" of the present moment (xii). This deep inhabiting of the moment and the awareness it brings can move us toward treating others, and ourselves, more gently and kindly.

So, mindfulness is paying attention to the present moment in a positive and patient way—having the intention of noticing with respect. When you notice the other with respect for their needs instead of judgment, then seeing their potential beauty will not be far behind. And once you experience the other as beautiful, reverence emerges. And reverence manifests in the world as kindness and compassion.

Thich Nhat Hanh explains that compassion is the most powerful force in the universe (2002). It is powerful for the giver because it releases us from our inner anger and confusion. It is powerful for the receiver because

it releases them to become their full creative selves in our presence. Ultimately, mindfulness contains two basic parts: 1) self-awareness that desires to be wide awake in the moment and 2) the intention of kindness toward others. As we grow in wisdom, we come to realize that kindness toward others both grows our own hearts and also grows awareness of the power of kindness in the other.

We need, desperately, to build a kinder and more compassionate world. It is, in fact, the fundamental missing ingredient—and need—of our time. It may seem to us that such a world is not only nonexistent now but far away in possibility. And, indeed, in many ways this goal is distant. However, the work of the heart does not travel in a straight line. It radiates and ripples out from each act of kindness in divinely mysterious and powerful ways. And for those of us who are educators, parents, or simply stewards of the world's children, there is a simple path before us that can open into the light. That simple path to a better future lies in finding ways now to treat our children with compassion and kindness.

Yes, this goal is challenging in our time—and in any other. But it is not beyond our ability to try. Matthew Fox, in *Creativity*, reminds us that when we attempt to create beauty, we are always right to do so, because in that engagement we are mimicking the Creator (2002, 82). No one is asking perfection from you. Even if perfect teachers existed, we don't have time to wait for them to do the work. All of the children are in need. And we are the teachers they know.

I will show you—in the next chapter—how to make kindness and compassion toward others a key part of your classroom goals and practices—a key part of your intentions. Then, throughout the rest of the book, I will show you how to conduct a writing workshop in your classroom in such a way that there is always an underlayer of kindness in the way we treat students and in the way we are coaching them to treat one another. I know this is what, in your heart of hearts, you want to do. I am honored to be here to try to help you accomplish this. Please don't worry that quality learning in skills will be lacking. You will see learners growing mightily in all areas.

Teaching for Quality, Providing Compassion

As I indicated in chapter 1, I developed these materials in response to teachers I was working with, in response to their fears and wishes. They had fears that they might not know which lessons to teach, and fears that they might not offer the lessons as powerfully as possible. These teachers, because they were dedicated to their students, wished to teach mighty craft lessons in an effectively designed sequence and in an accessible and yet complex enough way so that the lessons would "take" with their student writers.

Many of the most helpful books on writing workshop have offered steps and ingredients for classroom lessons that are similar to one another. Teachers who have skillfully followed those steps and carefully included those ingredients have often had much success. However, when I arrive at a school or at a meeting of teachers, I often find, as I have been reporting here, that teachers feel insecure and uncertain about what makes for a complete lesson and about what the keys are to making that lesson succeed with students.

For that reason, I would like to characterize the elements of a successful lesson in two stages. In the first stage, I will clarify what we might consider the conventional wisdom about what makes for an effective workshop lesson, an approach I call the "packed lesson." Second, I will explain the tuning we ought to do to refine this lesson to meet the needs of students who have experienced trauma.

The Packed Lesson

The widely used steps for a workshop mini lesson derive perhaps most profoundly from the work of Brian Cambourne. The conditions for a successful lesson, according to Cambourne, include engagement, immersion, demonstration or modeling by the teacher, responsibility (choice and commitment by students), and "use" by students over time. So, the lesson itself should engage the learner with its purposefulness and creativity. The lesson should, as much as possible in a short time and space, immerse the learner in the literary issue under consideration.

Further, the lesson should involve a demonstration by the teacher—in a workshop, this is done both by offering models of professional mentor texts and also by offering examples of the use of that craft in the teacher's own writing. This is where the Calico Cat Lessons I include in this book can be especially helpful—because, in addition to the professional mentor texts and the teacher's rough-draft examples, we see how each craft step can be applied to the calico cat essay that I am writing. The calico cat lessons provide an extra layer to the immersion—an additional craft-step model from me as guest teacher, which enriches the selection of models being offered to demonstrate the craft. For reasons I can't entirely explain, when the calico cat part of the lesson arrives, the energy in the classroom rises to new levels. I hear students say, "This is fun!" and, "I want to try that!" Recently, when I walked into a classroom where I had been demonstrating with students for a time, a sixth grader greeted me with "I love your calico cat."

Finally, in each lesson the learners should be invited to "try on" the techniques—to "have a go" as the Australians say—by relating the craft

step to a piece of writing they are working on. This also fits with Craig's sense that students who have experienced trauma need to "do" what is being taught. All of this is done in an encouraging environment in which the teacher clearly expects that the learners will try the technique and will, with help, become successful.

The first time a teacher presents a craft step for student consideration and use, the collected writing workshop wisdom—as well as Cambourne's conditions for learning—suggest that we offer that craft step in what I am referring to as the packed lesson. Even in subsequent lessons on a craft step, the teacher may want to include a light stop at each of these steps.

I present the steps of the packed lesson here for two reasons. First, it is a guide to review the steps of the lessons contained in this book, so that when you teach them, you will be well-versed in the pattern of the lesson you are using.

Second, and perhaps more importantly, I am presenting these lesson steps so you can utilize the pattern to design your own packed lessons. It is necessary to teach more than one lesson on any key craft issue with students. Teaching a craft step once is a lot like mentioning something once in a conversation: Your listener will not automatically hear fully what you say and take it to heart. Additionally, you will, of course, want to teach lessons on other craft steps than those included in this book. So, the packed lesson can be a guide, or template, for planning those lessons as well. For those teachers who have felt insecure about the quality of their lessons, this offers a step-by-step guide. And for teachers who are already schooled in these steps, there is no harm in reviewing what works!

The Packed Lesson

As I said above, the first time a teacher teaches a craft step to students, I believe, this should be done in the packed lesson. The packed lesson includes:

1) clarifying how and why this craft step may be important to effective writing for an audience;
2) a clear explanation of what the craft consists of—a definition of the craft step—and how a writer begins to practice this craft move;
3) mentor text examples of effective use of the craft step—to demonstrate points 1 and 2 above;
4) examples of the teacher attempting to utilize the craft step with her/his own piece of writing—in this case, also including an example of how the craft step might help improve the calico cat essay;

5) a "work period" during which the students have a go at trying to make use of the craft step in a piece of writing that they are working on; and
6) a "sharing time" during which students are invited to share out the result of their "have a go" experiments and to share their discoveries or to ask further questions in a supportive environment.

Tuning the Lesson toward Trauma-Informed Practices

How can each craft lesson include trauma-informed healing, as well as providing Cambourne's intellectual conditions? I offer guidance for this both by incorporating methods for countering stress and anxiety in your classroom when they occur and also by clarifying how each craft lesson can incorporate Susan Craig's trauma-informed teaching and learning practices. Frequently, in between chapters of this book I provide a "Trauma-Informed Teaching Tip" that grows our cumulative sense of a healing approach we can take in our classrooms one ingredient at a time. Also, each chapter and mini lesson of this book incorporates three key aspects of Susan Craig's trauma-informed teaching practice (as presented in chapter 1).

What I Say to Students: What, Why, How

First, we have learned from Craig that students who have experienced trauma need to be helped to understand the lesson on three brain levels. "What" is the technical or practical issue being taught—define it, give examples, show what it looks like. "How" can the learners engage actively with the topic—what does it look and feel like to engage with this craft issue? "Why" would someone engage with this topic or technique? What is the purpose? Why might this step become important in a writer's relationship with a reader?

In each lesson, or chapter, I first talk briefly just to you, the teacher. Then I quickly move to a section called "What I Say to Students: What, How, Why," which presents what I say to students in presenting the lesson and which carefully includes attention to each of the three brain levels: what, how, and why.

Dialogic Teaching

The second technique offered by Craig was the need for a lesson to be "dialogic." The "What I Say" part of the lesson is primarily teacher talk—though the teacher should pause for questions at certain points and, of course, be gracious in receiving them. However, at the next point, when we

move to the "Mentor Text" models part of the lesson, this should be done dialogically. We may need to explain an opening mentor text example ourselves. But with subsequent examples, we should invite students to think and talk with us about "how" the mentor text sample does indeed show the craft step being discussed. This can be scaffolded by the teacher doing a "think-aloud" (as Craig recommends) with an initial mentor text example before inviting students into the talk. And this step can often be facilitated by having students turn and talk to a peer, allowing them to brainstorm together for a moment.

The Doing Classroom

The third of Craig's key ideas included in each lesson is that students are given an early opportunity to "do" something with the material being learned. Of course, with writing workshop we are moving toward students doing the craft step being discussed. However, Craig is talking about something more urgent and timely with doing—right during the mini lesson.

This is accomplished in each lesson by going from dialogically presented mentor text examples—and the calico cat examples-in-process—directly to the "Student Task: Have a Go—Students Doing" part of the mini lesson.

Discourse Review: Restorative Conversation

As I have been expressing, it is a belief of this book that how we teachers talk has a profound impact on how students learn. To help us focus that talk, each chapter ends with two brief additional sections. The "Discourse Review: Restorative Conversation" and "Common Misstep: Supportive Coaching Moves" sections offer advice for how to handle the discourse of the learning work so the lesson will be both strategically effective in relation to writing and also restorative to students who have experienced trauma.

The Discourse Review will remind about and clarify ways to monitor how we speak and respond throughout the lesson and how we can also help students talk in productive ways.

Common Misstep: Supportive Coaching Moves

In "Common Misstep: Supportive Coaching Moves," the final section of each chapter, I will cover one or two common errors students make in working with the craft lesson under consideration. This may be one of the more important parts of each chapter in working toward the discourse goals Gee, Johnston, and Craig would have us achieve.

Error is, of course, necessary to learning. Perfect performance merely shows that the student already knew that step. I have found that teachers' carelessly negative responses to student practice efforts and errors are often among the biggest obstacles to classroom learning success. A negative judgment is rarely—maybe never—called for while students are in-progress working on something new. Rather, skillful teacher or peer discourse will include praise for effort and for trying new approaches, as well as acknowledgment of partial success for the purpose of coaching the student about the next step they might try.

Students who have experienced trauma need, even more than other students, to know they are emotionally safe as they risk-take by trying new steps. The discourse approaches we take and the subsequent supportive coaching responses we make to student errors can provide that foundation of safety.

Using the Chapters in Order—Or Not

The packed, trauma-sensitive lessons offered through this book are designed as a sequence, in order of how lessons might be taught. Our next chapter, chapter 3, launches the classroom work as it explains how to build a foundation of mindfulness in your classroom. The chapter offers guidance about how to establish a basic "respect agreement" with your students, as well as establishing ongoing parameters for response to each others' writing.

Most subsequent chapters are designed to guide a teacher in how to offer a certain craft lesson—powerfully and in a restorative manner.

The order of classroom lessons, of course, can be quite different, depending on the goals of the teacher or needs of the writer(s). However, in general, the order of lessons here suggests that first students may need help *getting good topics*. Even when offering students a choice of topics, effective teachers help students choose topics wisely.

Then, in order, this book proposes that we teach: building moments through **sensory detail**, seeing imaginative meanings in a topic through **metaphor**, engaging the reader by varying the **leads or beginnings**, and achieving powerful closure through different types of **endings**. At that point, we have addressed the key elements of a piece of writing. However, we have not yet addressed all of the key aspects of achieving quality. So, as ways to further develop and refine our piece, we next focus on energizing writing through **vivid verbs**, focusing the reader by searching for **precise nouns,** and considering the effects of alternative ideas for **organization** of a piece. The book then addresses **argument**, or **persuasive writing**, as

a genre, offering ways to get good topics, key argument craft steps, and ways to address audience analysis. The last genre area the book takes up is **research**. Research is often the least well-done genre of writing in school. This need not be the case, because inquiry is a most interesting and worthwhile intellectual activity.

It is my argument in this book that memoir, and the craft steps of a quality memoir, make a fine foundation also for persuasive and informative writing. The same passion a student feels when writing an important personal memoir must be found in order to produce a quality effort for argument or research writing. The sensory moment that intensely shares the essence of your memoir with a reader becomes the shining moment of experiential evidence in an argument and also the key illustrative example of your research paper. Leads and endings are similarly important in argument and research, as they are in memoir, and often have the same rhetorical goals—to open engagingly and to close meaningfully—and so forth.

Finally, I show how to help students work effectively toward **correctness**. As others have explained, correctness is not so unimportant that it is left to last. Rather, that is where correctness becomes important, at the end—when the whole piece has been developed and needs to be made presentable for a public audience.

Although all of these issues are of high importance, as all writing teachers come to know, they cannot all be taught at once. This book is seeking the most productive order, in sequence. However, if you see your students could benefit from a certain craft lesson at a certain point, the book is written so that each craft lesson stands on its own and can be offered at any time. In the end, the goal of publication beyond the classroom is also a major incentive for students to revise toward quality.

To sum up, in each lesson we look carefully at professional writers, we visit how the lesson might relate to the calico cat essay, study reflectively how both the professional mentor texts and calico cat writing "work," and then have a go at trying to work like those writers ourselves. Finally, we almost always take time for sharing of writing, a step that, similar to later publication beyond the classroom, validates for students their putting in the effort it takes to write well. We do these writing experiments in an environment of emotional safety and supportive coaching. Studies suggest that students become creative and effective problem solvers by being placed in a learning environment of kindness and respect—where they feel safe enough to try new things. And we don't have to leave the presence of kindness and respect to chance. There are pedagogical methods for bringing these qualities systematically into our teaching.

Appendix A

Guide Sheet/Template for … Designing a Packed Lesson

1) What Is the Craft Step?
(two minutes)
Say what exactly the craft step or writing ingredient is that you will be teaching about. In short, what is it, and why is it important?

2) Definition
(three minutes)
Give an informal further and fuller explanation of what this craft step is and how it works. Say: 1) a short definition, 2) what the writer is trying to do with this craft step, and 3) what the impact/result is for a reader when this step is done well.

3) Mentor Text Examples, Plus Calico Cat Example
(ten–fifteen minutes, allowing for student interaction)
Present print examples (accompanied by read aloud) of three or four mentor text examples from children and adolescent literature, or from approachable adult literature. The examples should not be too lengthy, and they should not just be left to stand alone. The teacher explains how one or two examples "work" and then asks/allows students to take a turn (after pair-sharing, perhaps) at explaining how one or two examples seem to work in relation to the craft step under consideration. Then the teacher focuses on the calico cat example to see how, in that essay draft, the writer is attempting to utilize the craft step under consideration.

4) Teacher (or, Later, Student) Example of Use of Craft Step:
(five minutes)
It is important for students to see imperfect models—such as the teacher's in-progress attempt to utilize this step with writing that she/he is working on. And it is important for students to see the teacher as a fellow writer trying to achieve quality. The calico cat essay examples of the craft step (used in step 3 above) also add the modeling of a "guest teacher"—me.

5) Have a Go
(ten to twenty minutes)
The students get a ten-to-twenty-minute work period to try to make use of the craft step to improve a piece of writing that they are working on. Possibly, the teacher will begin the work period by having one or two volunteers get brainstorming help from the whole group with their own pieces. This allows everyone to rehearse and think-aloud about the craft step. Then, usually, the teacher tries to write on her/his own piece at the beginning of the have a go period and then circulates to offer encouragement and help.

6) Share Time
(five to fifteen minutes)
The teacher makes time available—almost always—for students to share out the results of their have a go efforts. Students can share successes, which will show other students further examples of how this step can work. And students can share difficulties they ran into, which can result in a final moment of group brainstorming to help one or two students over a problem-solving moment.

(Times given are typical, not absolute rules. This packed lesson involves more teacher talk than later, shorter follow-up lessons on this craft step. However, because the teacher invites questions about the definition, asks students to weigh in about what they observe in mentor text examples, and allows students to comment on the teacher example, the lesson is interactive, rather than just a listening time for students.)

CHAPTER 3

Namaste: Mindfulness and Respect as Foundation for the Workshop Classroom

(A Guide for Teacher Coaching and for Peers Helping Peers in Writing Circles)

> Just embrace somebody to your heart and you are creative. Just look with loving eyes at somebody … just a loving look can change the whole world of a person.
>
> **—Osho**

> The tree that is beside the running water is fresher and gives more fruit.
>
> **—Saint Teresa of Avila**

INTRODUCTION:
Namaste: Healing and Growth through Classroom Relationships

Audrey's Story, Part 1

She sits silently in her seat, looking like the other sixth-grade girls. This is a rural Midwest classroom, not a world of $250 jeans or high-brand blouses or shoes. But her straight shoulder-length blonde hair seems clean and neat. And working from the salvage of Target and Kohl's, her clothes look every bit as respectable as the other girls. But those blue eyes are not easy to read—her expression, too steadily neutral. She gives attention to the moment, but something suspenseful remains, something under the surface that will come out. And sometimes, as if an overhead flashing light has gone on and then off, her expression widens and then shadows over, showing her fear …

* * *

As I have explained, research on trauma-informed healing approaches not only establishes that these approaches can well support the learning of all students but also clarifies that these approaches can be taken while keeping in stride toward high academic achievement. It is not a question of setting aside high standards. Rather, it is a question of providing both high expectations and, also, supportive scaffolding to achieve those expectations.

I have laid out in chapter 1 the reasons for moving our teaching toward trauma-sensitive practices and explained some of the key ingredients for such a move. In chapter 2 I presented more exactly how we can tune the elements of our lessons to both foster healing and also to help students achieve high-quality writing. The entire remainder of this book is devoted to how to implement that blended approach in your classroom.

Most fundamentally, the trauma-sensitive classroom described by Susan Craig, combined with the discourse-safe environment that I am clarifying, can build a mindful and mutually respectful environment as a foundation under student risk-taking. Craig suggests we begin this with a "respect agreement" to establish a community of caring for the group work. And she suggests the need for a pervasive predictable kindness—in

word and tone—to succeed with the dialogic relationships in the room.

Teaching the mindfulness concept of namaste at the outset of my work with students establishes a shared understanding of our safe relationship that I have found even elementary school students can quickly grasp. Further, the positive response protocol that I utilize for all classroom response to writers and their writing—by teachers and student peers alike—provides a healing and supportive scaffold as underpinning for all critique of in-progress writing. I have witnessed this combination of features restore confidence to young writers and also provide clear guidance for next steps the writers can take toward quality writing. Together, the foundation of namaste combined with the positive response protocol constructs and enacts the basic respect agreement needed by all, though by some more urgently than others.

When I introduce the concept of namaste to students as a basis for our working together, I also present it right off as a foundation for responding to other writers. I offer a lesson on the word itself. I emphasize that this is the essential concept we will use to frame our relationship to one another. I suggest they say this word to one another as a greeting for the day and that they say it silently inside their heads as they prepare to respond to someone else's writing. And then, in the next few days, I proceed to teach how to do writing circles, as I am going to teach you in this chapter.

What I Say: What, How, Why

I explain to students that namaste is a Sanskrit term literally meaning "I bow to you." Because the term comes from the East, people in Western culture have often experienced it in yoga or meditation. It is also related to the bowing at the opening of a martial arts session. It is often helpfully translated as "The spirit in me bows to the spirit in you." At the end of her wonderful book *Warriors Don't Cry*, Melba Pattillo Beals—one of the "Little Rock Nine" who integrated Little Rock Central High School in 1957—closes by saying to her readers, "Namasté (the God in me sees and honors the God in you)."

When I had the privilege of teaching a group of high school students from several different countries at the African American History Museum in Detroit not long ago, I asked them if they knew this term. Several of the twenty or so group members did know it. One young girl from Brazil explained that in her country, the term meant "The light in me is the same as the light in you." I like that translation very much.

After providing some information and then asking students to share what, if anything, they know about the term, I explain, "To me, the term

is best understood as meaning something like 'I recognize that you are a sacred child of the universe—that you are special and valuable to the universe. And I know that the universe expects me to help take care of you.'" I add that when they say this to me, it carries the same meaning from them to me. Then I say that the reason I am teaching this term is because it is necessary for us to feel this respect and appreciation—and this caretaking responsibility—for each other if we are to be the most helpful writing community for one another.

Audrey's Story, Part 2

I understand if some teachers might worry that this lesson moves the classroom toward religious issues. For this worry, I offer two responses. First, the concept of namaste is a spiritual practice that does not advocate for any specific religion or belief. It simply brings a concern for each other's well-being into our classroom community—a concern that, I believe, is overdue.

Second, student responses have shown me how much they value this foundation for their writing workshop community. One example is Audrey, the girl pictured in the opening scene of this chapter, from a sixth-grade group I worked with over several weeks. I noticed her as I observed the teacher interact with the class. Then, as I spoke on that first day, I could see by her intent gaze that she was carefully attending to this opening lesson on namaste. Afterward, in a break, she approached me to explain that she had been the victim of a harsh stepfather who, thankfully, was no longer in her family and who, she said to me, she was no longer permitted to see. With her mother's permission, she then began to write about those harsh experiences.

Subsequently, before our group convened each day, Audrey walked up to me wherever I was—whether unpacking my materials or chatting with the teacher— paused, and bowed, saying, "Namaste." I always then bowed to her and replied, "Namaste." I sensed she understood that we were making a promise to each other about how people were going to be treated in that room, and she deeply appreciated the atmosphere of respect I was working to co-construct for her in her work. Later, as the class planned an upcoming evening of sharing our writings with parents and friends, Audrey and another girl volunteered to explain the concept of namaste as an opening greeting to our visitors.

Respect Agreement

Even though I have been presenting the potential importance of utilizing the direct approach of mindfulness based on the mutual exchange of

"Namaste," it is quite possible to implement Susan Craig's idea of a respect agreement as a classroom foundation entirely without reference to namaste. I do both. I have designed my own four-point respect agreement (below). You may find this version suitable for you, or you may prefer to devise your own—or you may begin with mine and revise as you go. Ordinarily, having taught the idea of namaste, I elaborate by presenting the guidelines of our classroom respect agreement:

Respect Agreement

- We are making a promise about how we are going to treat each other—this includes everyone.
- We are a family of writers who are going to take care of each other.
- We are practicing "making the kind choice."
- We fulfill this promise partly by how we respond to each other's writing (PQS).

I read each point aloud and expound briefly upon each. I clarify the word "promise" as a commitment we are making. I point out that we are learning traits of a healthy family. I then take up the words "family" and "kindness" dialogically, inviting the students to join in describing and elaborating about each. Together, we name healthy family traits such as offering help and support when needed, being willing to be interested in what is important to another family member, and having an underlying intention to be caring.

In taking up the word "kindness," I point out how almost all religions teach it. Then I ask students to help give a definition for kindness. I ask them to give example moments of kindness in their lives. I ask them to explain what kindness "looks like" and "sounds like." They usually do this well. I make certain we clarify that kindness involves placing caring in your heart and then making your speech and actions match that caring. Then I say, "You will have six or twelve, or more, times each day when someone does something or something happens, and you will have the opportunity to choose how to respond." And I remind them, "At those times, we are practicing making the kind choice." Finally, I say I am soon going to teach them a way to respond to each other's writing and that I have chosen this way of responding with our classroom family because it is both what research on "response" recommends and also a kind way to respond.

Two Key Principles Guiding Response

1. Teaching writing must involve coaching the individual writers toward their goals.

The teaching of writing, even more than many other subjects, is really the teaching of each individual learner. Lessons and instructions are offered from the front of the room, but at some points, individual coaching must also occur. The saving grace is that not all of this coaching needs to come from the teacher. If prepared and practiced properly, peers often can provide useful coaching advice to one another.

2. The workshop must occur in the midst of a mutually respectful classroom conversation.

This is a point fundamental to adapting our work to mindfulness and to trauma-informed practice. Our mantra: How we talk to each other in the classroom makes all the difference to the learning that goes on.

Students have an intuitive awareness of whether they are being spoken to respectfully (Moffett, *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*, 1983). When we respond to a student notebook entry or their freewrite or to an early draft with immediate correction or judgment, we are not being respectful or helpful. First of all, this is not the time to "correct." If a student shows you a bold and interesting new vocabulary word in their rough draft and you pounce upon the fact that the word is misspelled, the result you get is not a better speller but a student less inclined to experiment in writing with bold words—because no one seeks out negative judgment. Further, you get a student who no longer wishes to show you their writing.

The model for a respectful conversation, according to James Moffett, is how we speak interactively with a friend. My homespun illustration for this goes like this:

> Your friend says to you, "I just saw the best movie I have ever seen last night."
>
> You do not say, "That would have been a better sentence if you had included the title of the movie in it."
>
> Instead, you say, "Oh, that's great! I'm glad to hear that. Tell me about the movie."

Donald Graves has argued that by treating students' writing primarily with correction and judgment, instead of coaching them graciously and supportively, we have created a society of people who treat a writing occasion as if they have been invited to an uncomfortable formal dinner. They arrive late, hope not to be noticed, and leave early.

It is to help us achieve the above coaching and discourse goals that I recommend the teaching of namaste as a basic part of a respect agreement—as a guide and reminder of our discourse intentions at all times. Further, I recommend the PQS, or positive response, protocol as part two

of that agreement, because it is a powerful way to establish a supportive coaching response to writers and writing. This PQS response framework is widely supported by the work of discourse theorists. It is recommended by current research on the helpful coaching of students, as summarized by John Hattie and Helen Timperley in the article "The Power of Feedback" (2007). These guidelines I recommend are true to Hattie and Timperley's research, as well as to those of Carol Dweck and Peter Johnston, but are my own steps and language. Here is a brief, self-contained presentation I provide for both teachers in workshops and students in classrooms on the PQS response pattern.

* * *

PQS: Positive Response Protocol

Research on helpful response asks us to coach the writer in a positive direction, not merely to offer our judgment (Dweck, 2007, 2015, Hattie and Timperley, 2007, Johnston 2012). One type of supportive and yet coaching response to a writer about a piece of writing is the PQS, or positive response, protocol. In responding to a writer during sharing time or in a conference, the teacher or peer follows this pattern:

1) **(P)raise**: What do you like best about the effort or paper?
   What seems most interesting or vivid?
   What do you remember best after reading?
   (I prefer: What do you remember best?)

Also: What craft steps do you see being used? Or, What is most successful in this piece so far?

2) **(Q)uestion**: What are you confused or curious about as a reader?
   Ask two or three questions.

3) **(S)uggestion**: Make your best one or two suggestions for what you feel would be the most helpful next steps for the writer and this piece.

We use this approach for several reasons. First, it is a tool to help the reader/coach—you get to know the piece by appreciating and questioning a bit before you feel prepared to coach next steps. A coach's best ideas are not usually off the top of their head but come after making contact with the writer and piece.

We use this approach to help the writer/learner. It is important to remember that in situations of anxiety, the listener cannot effectively hear you if their fear or anxiety rises too high. This is why people take someone

with them to receive a doctor's diagnosis sometimes—so the less involved person can hear. If we want our suggestions followed, we need to make the suggestions in a context in which the learner is comfortable and feels safe enough to be able to hear them.

Finally, we use this approach for technical reasons. No one can follow a multitude of suggestions. Humans do better at following one or two. By proceeding with appreciation and reflection first, you increase the likelihood you will offer your best one or two suggestions.

To be effective, this approach must be honest, specific, and relevant. You must refer to specific places in the paper and explain your points. Telling a writer that a piece is "great" when it is not is harmful because that response is vague and because it miscommunicates how much work good writing takes. When you become practiced in this protocol, you may examine a rambly freewrite and be able to *not* say, "My, you have a disorganized mess here!" And to say instead, "There is a vivid sentence halfway down the page—I wonder if that's what you should write about?"

* * *

Responding to student writing efforts is a point where great help can be offered, or it can become a point where great harm is done. To ensure that we offer help rather than deliver harm, the PQS response protocol becomes the consistent and fundamental way we respond to writing. As I have said, James Paul Gee makes this fundamental point about language use: We are never just delivering information when we speak or write. We are constructing a world (Gee, 1999, 11).

Johnston cautions that praise should be focused on the process and not offered as a blanket judgment of the person (38). Judging the person is not the goal, but praising their effort or willingness to try new steps can help them work toward important growth.

When praising student effort, we may be simultaneously praising a specific point of accomplishment in their work—as suggested in the "praise" part of the PQS response. Noticing as a teacher or peer coach where a craft step is well used or at what point the student made a kind of writing breakthrough is important.

I have visibly seen the glow that comes over a student's face when told of the pride in their work felt by their parent or teacher. We can say, "I am proud of the effort you put into this paper," or, "I am proud of the breakthrough you achieved by persisting in solving the problem." These statements allow us to be proud of someone's effort or achievement without making it a blanket judgment of the person.

Conducting Writing Circles

The PQS protocol offers the "partially scripted" steps and words for response that students recovering from trauma may especially need—as speakers and as listeners. However, in my classroom experiences, I have found the language and steps of this protocol to be the guidance we all need. Through practicing this protocol, teachers and students alike teach ourselves how to be respectful responders so that we effectively nurture and coach. The soothing assurance that response will always begin with the positive is much needed by all students in the room.

Teachers are sometimes their own biggest problem in relation to response to student writing. I have met many teachers who must do the equivalent of biting their tongue in order not to correct spelling or commas as soon as they see a piece of writing. If they give in to this habit or impulse to immediately correct, then research suggests, and I deeply believe, they are simply satisfying their own obsession, rather than helping the student writer. So, practicing the PQS pattern of response rigorously can be difficult for teachers. I sometimes say to teachers, for emphasis, "When a student shows you a piece of writing, the first thing you say must be positive."

However, we also need to teach our students to be such responders, so that learners can benefit optimally from coaching they receive from one another. My additional classroom recommendation for response, then, (in addition to the use of the PQS protocol), is to establish student writing circles in your classroom that also utilize this pattern.

Writing Circles

Teaching students to be effective peer coaches might seem like a tall order, especially with certain groups of students. However, unless we take the extra time and trouble to teach them these approaches and skills, there is always going to be a bottleneck in the classroom in which students are literally or figuratively lined up, waiting for the relatively rare opportunity to be coached by the teacher. Also, learning to be effective analysts of each other's writing is powerful as a tool for becoming more critically analytical about your own writing. And finally, although the teacher knows the most about writing, sometimes it is the advice of a peer that strikes just the right chord with the writer and opens up new possibilities for revision.

I have found writing circles to be effective with groups as young as first graders, and I am familiar with these circles working well on up through high school and college. In all settings, to begin I recommend that the teacher guide one small group of four in a "fishbowl" modeling of writing

circles for the whole class. The teacher ideally solicits a volunteer small group, but, if need be, a group can be required to demonstrate for the good of the class. The guide sheets I have adapted for my own classroom use are based on but not exactly like those in Jim Vopat's book *Writing Circles* (2009). These classroom guide sheets are presented at the end of this chapter.

The students agree on a timekeeper/leader for the day, and they establish which writer(s) will share by listing "Writer 1" and "Writer 2" at the start of the session. At the start of a series of sessions, writers might volunteer for the Writer 1 and Writer 2 slots, but in subsequent sessions, a new leader will be named each time, and the remaining writers, whose work has not yet been shared and discussed, will fill the Writer 1 and Writer 2 slots.

If a writer does not want to share their writing but only be a responder in the group, that can be accepted as a temporary, or an occasional, role. We would prefer that writers feel "ready" to share their work. But, ultimately, some sort of balance must be sought, one that asks writers to expect to share on a regular basis with their writing circle group members.

In the first-grade classes I was recently working with, the teachers used a fishbowl approach in an ongoing manner so that only one writing circle was operating at a time in the class. The remaining members of the class stood around the circle and observed this one group, and they shared their ideas also at the conclusion of each point (praise, question, suggest).

However, even as early as second grade, I have been directly present where writing circles throughout the room readily succeeded. The first day I taught writing circles to second graders, we did have a day of marginal chaos after the fishbowl session. Some groups were able to function right away, while other groups floundered, and all the while one little boy was almost perpetually wandering along behind me earnestly repeating, "Our group needs help!"

Each time he appeared in my wake, I assured him that I would shortly be over to help his group, and I kept this promise. In general, I tried to maintain a good-natured demeanor about the relative chaos, assuring the students that we were starting a new and somewhat difficult step. I let them know that I expected confusion while we practiced, and I promised that once we learned how to do them, the writing circle sessions would become a valuable part of our writing workshop classroom.

Even by the end of that first day in second grade, I felt I was already hearing helpful, intelligent conversations in the different groups. Students would be deliberating out loud whether it would be better for the writer to add a new section on such and such or to simply expand an existing section with more details—precisely the kind of response and reflection that I had hoped for.

Michael's Story

Over the next few weeks, I observed the second-grade class growing more and more at ease with the experience. One student, Michael, who had never previously shared with his peers—regardless of whether the opportunity was in the writing workshop or any other subject—volunteered to share as Writer 1 for the second session of his writing circle group. Michael volunteered so matter-of-factly that the teacher and I only knew of it by hearing from his excited group afterward. Part two of his story came soon after, when it was time for students to be selected to read aloud before a visiting group of parents and friends. The teacher drew names from a jar. When his or her name was read aloud, the student could say "yes" or "no, thank you" with respect to their willingness to read aloud on the celebration day.

Most students said yes readily, but when Michael's name was drawn and read aloud by the teacher, there was a sudden suspense in the room as eyes turned toward him. After only a brief pause, he said "yes," and the classroom burst into spontaneous applause.

To make that moment explicit—a second-grade boy who was known for not sharing became willing to share with not only his class but also with a visiting group of parents and friends after only a few weeks of writing circles—writing circles that carefully adhered to the PQS protocol.

Complementing Teacher Conferences

Not only are individual responses like Michael's helpful—and joyful—in their own right, but the auxiliary benefits are many of constructing a classroom environment in which students can get thoughtful and helpful feedback from their peers on an ongoing basis and are rescued, as I have pointed out, from waiting in line for the moment when the teacher finally has time for a conference with them.

The goal, of course, is not to replace teacher conferencing with writing circles, but rather for writing circles to companion with and supplement the teacher conference. I would argue that even if a teacher sees each student only once per month in a conference over a nine-month school year, those nine conferences are a powerful boost in coaching for the student to receive.

As to how often to do writing circles, there are a variety of possibilities. A teacher might devote Friday each week to writing circles. Or a teacher might pause and spend one entire week on writing circles if much of a class

now has drafts to share of a particular writing project. Once established, and after some practice time, the students can help select when to work in writing circles by letting the teacher know they feel the time is right.

The instructions on the guide sheet direct the leader to begin by asking the writer to read their piece aloud to their group. After the paper is read aloud once, the leader responds, "Thank you. Please read it again." This reading of the paper twice may seem laborious—and, indeed, you are free to choose a one-reading approach, of course. However, I have always found students to be receptive to this, and I feel I see the improvement in their responses after two hearings. In the case of very long pieces of writing, we found it quite workable for the writer to briefly tell about their piece overall and then read a section that they wanted the group to hear and respond to.

A compassionate classroom environment based on a respect agreement is important. If this respect incorporates the mindfulness concept of namaste, that is an even fuller providing of classroom culture—and an additional reminder of kindness. The PQS response protocol helps implement this respectful approach. A nurturing response to writing becomes an essential part of this classroom respect that helps support risk-taking, which in turn brings out the best in our student writers. And, though important for all students, this may be the crucial step needed for sustaining and growing connections with students who have experienced trauma.

Discourse Review: Restorative Conversations

Here are the important review points for establishing the concept of namaste as the basis of a respect agreement and foundation for your writing workshop. And here are reminders of the core issues of the PQS protocol for responding to writing. First, the word namaste carries, most of all, a sense of reverence for the basic personhood of the other as an individual. It is a request and a reminder to place the intention of kindness in all of our classroom interactions. Ongoing in life, there are choices of how to relate to another person. Usually, if we are sufficiently aware, we can see that one choice may be more kind than another. Here we are practicing and teaching ourselves to make the kind choice.

Students who have experienced trauma sometimes do not hear teacher instructions the first time because the student is particularly noticing the tone or physical gestures. Being sure to pair up our tone and gestures with a respectful discourse is important. Providing a collaborative dialogic environment that allows for student questions and includes opportunity for

pair sharing of understandings can also be important to helping these students enter the action.

Similarly, in utilizing the PQS protocol, it is important to achieve consistency. When we inadvertently start with suggestions, or when we offer minimal positive noticing and move instead to extensive suggestion-making, that is rightly received as negative judgment by the writer.

Common Missteps: Supportive Coaching Moves

I have been in classrooms where students have difficulty with the first step of noticing and remembering something positive from a writing piece. I will then step in and model, showing how I do this. I will also utilize other strong students in the room—invite them into the group for a short time so that they can show how to do this part. I remind the students that we are practicing to do this—that it is okay to have difficulty, but that, in time, we will have sharpened our ability to notice and remember from another's piece of writing.

Later, after working together for a bit, students may fall into a rut with their positive suggestions so that they become repetitious. "Add more detail" is a suggestion that first of all must be attached to a specific place in the writing. It is the task of the person making that suggestion to say, "Add more detail …," and to then add "where" in the piece they recommend detail be added. Even so, if one craft step becomes what students are responding to, the teacher can intervene and model, for the whole class or for one writing circle group, other types of suggestions the teacher would make as a responder. Further, the teacher can remind students to consider noticing positively, and/or to make suggestions about, the latest craft step that the teacher has taught in a mini lesson.

Finally, students sometimes fall into a type of questioning that is actually negative comment. Either "Why did you write it that way?" or, "Why are you writing about that?" could be useful questions at a certain point perhaps, but more often among novice PQS responders, they are accidental negative attacks. One way to help students adjust out of this is to state for them, "Let's move away from the 'why' questions we have been asking into 'how' or 'what' questions."

"How would you like readers to feel?" Or, simply, "What happened after that part happened?" can be much more productive questions.

It is not the job of students to automatically know how to do these things. Rather, it is the job of students to risk-take and try out these new practices. Then it is the job of the teacher to diagnose strengths and weaknesses of the student practice and to respond with further coaching to help the students move forward.

Reflection on Audrey and Michael

We may wish that students automatically felt safe in our classrooms, but that is often not the case. Others of us may think the students need to get tough because "life is not a bowl of cherries." But actually, we ourselves are somewhat able to be tough in dealing with life's challenges only because of the people in our lives who treated us with kindness at key moments in the past. Kindness and love build resilience—harshness harms the development of resilience. And only when we are direct about our caring do students realize they are safe to take risks in our presence.

Appendix A

Guidesheets for Writing Circles: Guide Sheet/Record Sheet for Writing Circles

Leader/Timekeeper: (Name)

(Makes sure everyone is ready. Reminds people to use PQS response protocol—and makes sure they respond with "remember" and "like" *first*. Asks writer to read their piece aloud. After the writer finishes reading, the leader says, "Thank you. Please read it again." Then the leader invites responders to respond (immediately after hearing the second reading for younger students or, for older students, after they write a PQS note.)

1) First Writer: (Name, piece of writing)
2) Second Writer: (Name, piece of writing)

Guidelines:

a. Writer reads their paper—or key parts of their paper. Writer can explain parts not read. Writer can ask for help with one part if they want.
b. Responders use the PQS response protocol. (Responders may make "notes" to get ready to respond.)
   (P) What do you remember? What parts do you like? Where is craft?
   (Q) What are you curious or confused about? (Questions)
   (S) Suggestions—your one or two *best* suggestions.

Comments on Writing Circle: Reflecting on Writing Circle Time: (Put this in your notebook/journal or on a sheet your teacher provides.)

1) What happened in writing circle, and also the best part?
2) What did I learn?
3) Ideas for improving writing circle?

Response Sheet for Writing Circles

Leader/Timekeeper reads aloud each category (P, Q, and S) to invite responders to join the conversation for each of the three steps (or, with older students, the leader may read each category twice—once so responders can write their response note, and once so responders can present their responses—aloud to the writer—after writing their response notes).

1) **Positive Response**: What do you remember best from this piece? What parts do you like best, and why? What is most interesting to you about this piece? What craft techniques or steps do you see being used by the writer?
2) **Questions**: What are you curious about in relation to the topic of this paper? What are you confused about? What would you like to know?
3) **Suggestions**: Based on what you think is the writer's purpose, what are your *best one or two* ***suggestions***, especially for what the writer should:
    - **Add** to the piece? Does it need a new section, or is there a part that should be made longer?
    - **Take out** of the piece? Is a part unnecessary or repeated?
    - Or **change**? Is there a part that could be revised with a recommended craft step to improve it?

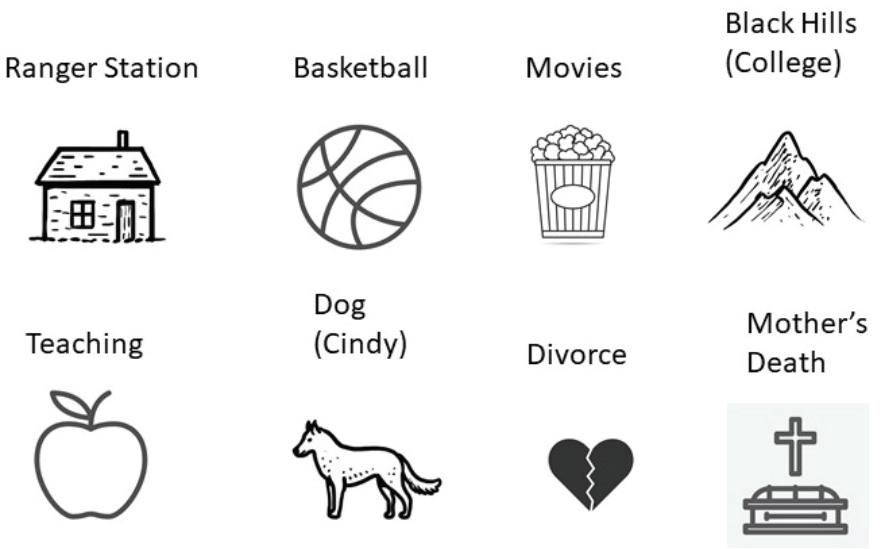
CHAPTER 4

Craft Lesson #1: Knowing How to Begin—Where Do Writers Get Their Topics?

The first step is receptivity, because in receptivity ego cannot exist—it can exist only in conflict. And when you are receptive, suddenly your faculty of imagination becomes tremendously powerful.

—Osho

Life Maps



Introduction: Life Maps

I am about to share with you my tried-and-true, can't-miss, never-fails-with-any-group-of-students, topic-generating activity. I use the word "my" loosely here, since at least several teacher help books share one version or another of this activity. Dan Kirby and Tom Liner also call their mapping activity in *Inside Out* a "Life Map" (2003, 56). My approach here is different from theirs, but we have the search for meaningful topics in our lives in common. Linda Reif, in *Seeking Diversity*, talks about "Memory Mapping," and she presents a positive/negative timeline of life events as a way of mapping possible topics (1992, 2001, 2006, 37). And, of course, clustering—or webbing, as it is sometimes called—is yet another way to visualize possible personal writing topics.

Below, I explain how I introduce the activity to students. Imagine, please, as you hear what I say to the students, that I am drawing a quick, clumsy picture of each item being talked about—on the board or on an

electronic projector screen. When you draw a life map, you are making a visual "list" of places, people, animals, activities, and events from your life—more or less in chronological order, from long ago to more recently—places, people, and situations that you recall at least somewhat vividly and that you might write about. The life map, as I work on it with students, is a simple activity, easy to do. However, do not underestimate its power to energize student writers. It comes with my gold-seal promise that it will breathe active life into your classroom of young writers.

Mini Lesson: What I Say to Students

"Today, I want to show you some good books and talk with you a bit about where real writers get their writing topics. [I hold up books and flip open to key pages, but do not read aloud.] Usually, if we investigate a writer's life, we see that the writer has had experiences that are somehow something like the experiences of their characters in their stories."

Picture One:

"This writer is writing about a place. It is a place that is important to the main character—a place where the character grew up, a special place the character got to visit, or a place where something important happened. [I hold up several books—one about a family cabin "up north," another about visiting "Grandma's house," another about a child who had to move from one place to another, etc.]

"A place that is important to me is the ranger station. Even though I am drawing this picture small, so that I can fit other pictures on my life map, actually, this was a big two-story building, with garage spaces for green fire trucks on the bottom and then the apartment where we lived on top.

"My father was the forest ranger, and I lived all eighteen years of my childhood in this ranger station. My father's job was, with his small crew, to fight forest fires, take care of injured or stranded animals, manage the forests to see if they had any diseases, and things like that. I got to help him do all of these things. It was a wonderful way to grow up. And I have many stories I could write about my life at the ranger station.

"Maybe you have places like the writers in the books write about or like the ranger station was to me?"

Picture Two:

"Now I am going to show you books by writers who wrote about an activity that they loved or that was especially important to them. Maybe this

activity lasted a short time or a long time, or just happened sometimes, but it seemed especially involving and interesting to the writer. Sometimes, even hobbies fit into this category. [I hold up a book about soccer, a book about bird watching, a book where someone plays a musical instrument or bakes cakes with Grandma, etc.]

"I am drawing a picture of a basketball. When I was a boy, basketball was very important to me. My big brother was a true basketball star—he led his team to the state tournament three years in a row and even played in college. In my small town, the coaches thought I might be as good as my brother because I looked a lot like him. I was a pretty good player too.

"If you asked me when I was eight years old, 'What are you going to be when you grow up?' I would have answered, 'A professional basketball player.' However, somewhere in high school, I got on the wrong side of my coach. He criticized his players a lot, and I didn't play better when he chewed me out—I'm not sure why. So, my plan to be a basketball star never finished working out. It was hard to be a senior in high school and sitting on the bench.

"Maybe you have activities you were involved in over time that turned out to be fun and valuable to you, and you still remember how good it felt to do those things? Or maybe, like me, you also had activities that didn't turn out the way you hoped they would, and it made you sad that they ended the way they did?"

Picture Three:

"What I am drawing now is another picture from my childhood—it is both a place and an activity. I am using a quick drawing of a box of popcorn to represent experiencing movies. In the 'olden days' when I grew up, and in the small town where I lived, the man who owned one of the two theaters in town came to school and sold us little tickets: ten tickets for $5. Each ticket got you in to one Saturday matinee movie. So, I could go to the movie on Saturday and see all of my school friends there. It was noisy and crowded, but we had a lot of fun. For the last day of the ten movie Saturdays, they showed a triple-feature of three Western movies—and it wasn't too many!

"Maybe you can think of a second place that was important to you or a second kind of activity that gave you a lot of fun or a chance to be with friends or family, or a chance to learn about something?

Picture Four:

"There are quite a few writers who write about something that happened at school. Or, at least, their stories have school as one of the settings of their story. [Hold up several books—one about bullying at school, one about making best friends at school, one where part of the plot occurs at school, etc.]

"When I graduated from high school, I went far away to the Black Hills of South Dakota to go to college. These peaks that I am drawing represent the Black Hills—which are sort of like mountains, only with a lot of trees and grass on them. At my little college, I was editor of the school newspaper, and I worked for the local daily newspaper too. I had a girlfriend. I learned about new kinds of music from my new college friends. I also finished learning that I really loved to read—all kinds of books.

"Maybe you have a story about making friends or having a certain kind of problem or what you learned that you liked or hated while you were at school?"

Picture Five:

"Sometimes, writers write about the job or profession they learned to do or became a part of. So, we get books about being a firefighter or police officer, or about being a doctor or a veterinarian, or about people who became famous players in a sport or of a musical instrument. [Hold up books, show a few key pictures, and explain what the main character is involved in.]

"I became a teacher. Let's say this is an apple on my desk that someone gave me. Teaching is very important to me. I love teaching. And I have stories to tell of different parts of my teaching life.

"You have not gotten your adult job yet, but maybe you know someone who does a certain job, and you know this person so well that you could write about them on their job? Or maybe you love animals or music or some school subject, and you hope to be involved in this when you become an adult?"

Picture Six:

"Sometimes, writers write about animals. It is amazing, actually, how much has been written about different animals. Often, writers write about animals they have known. [Hold up books about cats, dogs, birds, etc.] This is a sketch that looks maybe like a lumpy moose, but actually it represents my favorite all-time dog, Cindy. Sometimes, dogs have ordinary people names, so I always apologize if there are girls named Cindy in the room when I

draw this picture. I have already written two essays about my dog, Cindy. One of them has been published.

"I am also writing about a calico cat of mine named Mama. And I have also written about another dog we had named Mike.

"Perhaps you have had pets that you cared about? Or maybe you got to know an animal somehow? Or maybe you visited a zoo or a farm? Or maybe you have a favorite animal, and you could write about what makes that your favorite animal?"

Picture Seven:

"Sometimes, writers write about some of the saddest things in their lives. That might seem surprising to you if you've only written about happy or fun things so far. But the sad or difficult times in life are important stories to tell too. Actually, they have done medical research that shows that people who write about sad things seem to get healthier—one test showed that people who wrote about sad things, even if they never shared their writing, had more disease-fighting T-cells in their blood than other people who didn't write about such things. [Hold up books about people in tough spots or difficult times, or who are facing obstacles or feel alone in their trouble, or who have had loved ones leave or die.]

"I am drawing a picture of a broken heart, like a Valentine heart. This zigzag line down the middle shows that it is broken. I have been through divorce in my life. I'm not proud of being divorced, because when you marry someone, you are promising to stay with them. But divorce is something important that I have been through and hope I have learned from.

"Perhaps your family has experienced divorce or separation? Maybe your parents or someone in your family has gotten divorced or had to live separate for some reason? Maybe you got separated from a friend? Maybe that friend moved away? Or maybe something happened, and you stopped being friends? Those are important stories to tell. And sometimes, when you tell these kinds of stories, you and your readers both learn important things about life that can help you in the future."

Picture Eight:

"In life, it happens that we don't always get to keep the people we love. Sometimes, the people leave us, or we leave them—like I was talking about a moment ago. Other times, people get very sick or even die. So, before long in our lives, we have people we love who have died or moved away. Or if we love animals, sometimes, we may have animals that die. Let's say

this drawing is a drawing of my mother's coffin. I'll put a little cross over her coffin because church and her Christian beliefs were very important to her. I loved my mother very much, and I have so many stories to tell about her—from growing-up times and from being a grown-up and still being her friend. I have been writing about her in a book I am working on. Some of that story is about how many different ways she showed she loved me when I was a kid. She read to me a lot, and I loved that. She baked cookies and pies, and I loved those. And even though we didn't have very much money, if I really wanted a certain toy, she tried to get it for me. I still remember the Christmas when I got a brand-new bike—the only new bike I ever got.

"Perhaps you could write about someone you loved who is no longer around? Maybe a grandparent has died? Or maybe someone has moved away? Or maybe you just don't get to spend time with a certain person anymore? Maybe you can think of someone you really loved, or at least cared about, and tell stories about what you loved or what made them special? Or maybe you knew an animal that died?"

Often, I include additional pictures on my life map, up to ten or twelve. Sometimes, the pictures are simply additions in the same categories as outlined above. On the map I have included here, after my mini talk, I have about eight pictures. Next, when I distribute unlined white paper for the students to draw their life maps on, I sit down and draw those pictures from the front board on my piece of paper, so I am drawing as the young writers draw. Then I might add additional pictures to remind me of additional topics. With the life map included here, I sometimes have added a lake with trees around it, representing a place where my parents had a trailer that we often went to on weekends. I have added a bird—I love birds, and I feed the birds in my yard. I have added stick figures of the Rolling Stones in concert. Stick figure people are fine, and also any short labels, like "Uncle Mike," people want to add to their maps are fine. The map is to be a helping device for getting good writing topics. It is not a test of memory or of anything else. Sometimes, I say, "No fair drawing good art. Just make quick sketches. If you decide to illustrate your story, you will draw the illustrations later. These sketches are just topic reminders."

Student Task

So, now, as I have been indicating, we are at the point where each student can quickly sketch out her or his own life map. I remind them to keep things more or less in chronological order—from early days through up

until recently. And as they are sketching, I remind them of the different types of topics on my list. My list has not been developed randomly—nor should yours be when you are demonstrating. I make sure that I have an important place (ranger station). I make sure I have a hobby, special activity, or sport or art that I either did or still do (basketball). I make sure I include special points of passage or achievement in my life—a success (college, teaching job). I make sure that I have moments of my trying and not succeeding—moments of heartbreak (divorce) and moments of great loss and sadness (mother's death).

Each time a certain type of topic appears on your list/map, you, as the teacher, are modeling what topics it is okay to write about. The students don't automatically know what is a good topic. We must teach that. Also, they often need permission to focus on something as personal as a hobby or as sad as the death of a loved one. Sometimes, teachers question whether they should (or whether *I* should) include such grown-up topics as my divorce and such hard topics as death.

I have three quick thoughts about that. First, look at what all the books in any usual bookstore are about—often, they are about personal struggle, striving, or overcoming loss. We must give students permission to write about the real topics of their lives, or else writing time isn't fully real and important. Second, I don't think death and loss are to be hidden from the very young. We don't force them to dwell on something if they don't wish to. However, I often get the opportunity to do life maps with different-age children. I have never met a kindergartner who hasn't been deeply disappointed or made deeply sad by some event. And I haven't met many who haven't had a grandparent, parent, acquaintance, or pet die. Some of the most heartfelt papers I have read are from early elementary students for whom their paper is a chance to share about, celebrate, and grieve the death of a pet or a grandparent.

Third, Flannery O'Connor, a famous American fiction writer, makes the point that the "dragons we pass by" in our lives are what make the very best writing topics. Medical doctors agree, in their own way, as I have indicated, by providing research about how people who write about tragedy and sadness seem to have healthier blood.

After I have quickly sketched out my life map on paper and then circulated around the room, pausing to help students who might need it, we all pause and reflect on our life maps. My next instruction is to "place a check mark beside the picture you believe you wish to write about. If there are several you wish to write about, then you must select one to start with."

After each student has checked beside one picture, I ask all of us to do a five-to-eight-minute freewrite about that topic. To me, freewriting

is a combination of "thinking out loud on paper" and/or just starting out "telling about" your topic. In a freewrite, you write as quickly as you can—spilling your thoughts or parts of the story out, not worrying about order or correctness or even quality. All of that comes later. I sometimes say, "Volume is virtuous in freewriting." We are trying to not stop and think but instead to just get as many words down as we can in a short time. We might cross out words we don't want, but we don't stop to erase—that takes too much time.

Sharing Out

When the short writing time has passed, I ask us to stop (because I have been freewriting also). And then we share around the circle—me first. We do not read from our freewrites at this point. Instead, each person holds up their map, which the others may not be able to see that well at a distance (that's okay), and points to the checked sketch, saying, "This is my life map, and I am writing about _____." A student can pass if they need to. After a very short time, every student has been involved in sharing out, and we all have heard whether there are shared topics (several students writing about pets, for example) and also how many different topics are being engaged with around the room.

After three or four days of freewriting briefly about different life map topics each day, each student is asked to select one to go forward with, one that represents a piece of writing they believe they are willing to develop, to craft further to make it "good," and to then edit, to make it "correct." No real writer would work hard to craft a piece, nor later to edit it, unless the piece seemed purposeful and worthwhile. Also, as I have said, no real writer would work hard on a piece unless it was, at some level, to publish it later for an audience.

We now have a piece of writing we are working on, something like a piece a professional writer might choose to work on—as we have seen in the mentor texts. We also have a life map in our folder to take forward with us as a source of some future writing topics as well. Next comes how we work hard on a piece to craft it, to make it a quality piece of writing. The short answer to that issue is that the teacher will now offer craft lessons to engage the student writers in craft experiments such as those real writers do to improve their own writing and to make their own writing good.

Raven's Story

As I write this, I can think of a classroom moment recently when I was working with fourth graders. After the life map activity, one fourth grader, Raven, came up to tell me about her grandmother who had recently died. I patted the side of her head gently and told her I was very sorry to hear that, but she could write about her grandmother if she wished. The next session, at break time, when most students were quickly getting into their snacks and chatting with one another, Raven came up to show me her early draft of the paper about her grandmother. Her writing included how she had gone to her grandmother's house every afternoon after school, where there were always treats and where she and her grandmother would play games of cards.

After commending her for how she was already sharing much that happened between her grandmother and her, I asked her if there was anything else special that happened between them. Raven said that after her grandfather died, her grandmother brought out her grandfather's special blanket and gave it to her. I said, "Oh, that should probably be put in your paper!" Raven then sat right down on the hard wood floor and began to write out this new section to her paper—a beautiful moment for me with a student.

Reflection on Raven

When students experience modeling of topics real writers write about and are then encouraged to brainstorm from their own lives, often deeply important topics come to mind for them. And also because that modeling has occurred, the students realize that they, too, have permission to write about these things that matter.

CHAPTER 5

Craft Lesson #2: Sensory Detail

To grow real roses is difficult, you can purchase plastic roses. They will not deceive you, but they will deceive the neighbors.

—Osho

The Calico Cat: "A Freewrite"

> There is a stray calico cat that lived in my garage. I always wished she had a better home, but I was taking pretty good care of her. I took care to see that she had enough food and water and a warm place to sleep, even if her bed was just unused house insulation.
>
> A calico cat, of course, is three different colors—orange, black, and white. Sometimes, there is a lot more of one of these colors than the others. Sometimes, in fact, calico cats are mostly white. This calico cat, however, is mostly bright orange and dark black, with patches of white. Her face even is all three colors.
>
> At first, she used to trudge across my yard, all skinny and tired from having nowhere to live. I would feed her on the ground, next to the fence. But then, one day I found her in my garage, lying among the junk, only not by herself. She had three brand-new baby kittens. "Oh no," I said to myself. "Now she'll starve from giving milk to her kittens unless I feed her and take good care of her." So, I started to bring her food and water in the garage every day, and I made sure, by sometimes leaving the door open, that she could come and go—and so could her kittens.

The Calico Cat: "Sensory Detail Moment: a Scene"

> When I pick her up, her short fur is soft and smooth. Sometimes, once she's in my arms, she touches my nose with her cold nose—like a little kiss. I nuzzle her and smell the dust she rolled in. Then I can hear her start to purr, like the putt-putt-putt of a quiet running engine. She stares into my eyes with her dark, clear eyes, like she is trying to see into my brain or like she already knows what I am thinking. I love her light-orange color best—it is pumpkin orange or the orange of the lightest robin's breast or the faint orange part of a sunset. She settles into my arms, her weight resting against my chest. For now, she is safe and warm.

Introduction: Sensory Detail

It is almost true to say that all of writing is telling a story. It just depends on the purpose for your storytelling. In a narrative, you are telling the story for artistic, emotional, life-understanding purposes. In an informational or expository piece, you are telling the story to inform, guide thinking, and demonstrate "how it is." In persuasive writing, you are telling a story in order to illustrate or exemplify the nature of the problem or the benefits of your proposed solution.

Even in research and persuasive writing, the heart of the piece is still most often the story. The story/example may be from the reading research, it may be from ethnographic (or observed) research, or it may be from the

lived experience of the researcher. The story/example may even be hypothetical, "how it usually goes" for the person who suffers from a problem or "how it ought to go" if we are effectively solving the problem.

So, I would argue, the story is actually at the heart of nearly all writing. Of course, there are types of writing for which this is not quite true. There are scientific lab reports, business progress reports, fact-based information sheets, and other examples of pieces of writing that are not story-based. But the point for our purposes here is how very often it is true to say that writing is about story.

One reason for saying that is because it then affords me the opportunity to clarify that the fundamental craft step for most quality writing has to do with: a) selecting the most useful/relevant story (or example) to tell and b) telling that story in as powerful sensory detail as possible—whether it is relatively little detail in a short piece or abundant detail in a longer piece.

In short: the most direct way to make your writing "good" is to include sensory detail of important moments.

It bears noting here that both step a and step b are heuristics. A heuristic is a non-rule-governed problem-solving method. All academic fields and all professions have their own set(s) of heuristics.

Many things about writing are, indeed, rule-governed: how a word is spelled, when to capitalize a letter, even where the comma goes. However, most of the techniques that have to do with making writing "good" are not rule-governed, but rather in the realm of heuristics. So, in our case here, for example, "Which story/example should I tell?" and "How many details are enough?" are not questions that can be answered by a rule of right or wrong. These questions are, in the end, artistic judgments. They are "answered" by following the guidance of an expert mentor-coach, they are answered by practice over time, and they are answered by sharing your writing with an audience and noting if your desired purpose seems to be achieved with that audience.

It may not be too soon to remind, though, that writing is, to some important degree, a spatial art—what the writer spends the most space on will tend to seem most important to a reader. It stands, then, that artfulness partly depends on going into the most detail on what the writer has determined is the most important example or the most important moment of the story.

Lesson One: What, How, Why

Having clarified why sensory detail is our first craft lesson—because it is the shortest, surest way to make our writing good—I always introduce sensory detail to my student writers with these steps. I give a very short

talk about how human beings are usually thought to have five senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Human beings do not experience life except through these five senses, so no wonder we need to work with the senses if we want readers to "experience" our writing.

An easy exercise to get students involved in cothinking about this is to send them out to do a sensory observation. In this experiment, they place themselves somewhere for about half an hour and simply record everything they can get down that comes to their five senses. They try to avoid drawing conclusions or sharing emotions during this recording, and simply stick to noticing the five senses.

For early elementary students, I might give them a piece of paper divided up into five parts, each part labeled with one of the five senses, so they can record under each category. For high school and college students, I might just say, "It doesn't matter how many of which sense you get recorded. Whatever you choose to notice will serve our purposes here to explore humans' sensory life." When students bring these record observations back to our classroom, we share them and discuss which senses were most used (humans are eye-and-ear-dependent) and what we notice about human noticing.

Visceral and Kinesthetic Sensations

During or after this exploration and discussion, I add two more sensory realms to our list. I point out that some of what they have recorded (usually) are "visceral sensations," or bodily responses to the environment: your heartbeat picks up when someone you are romantically interested in approaches, the back of your neck tightens when your boss walks into the room, your head begins to ache across the brow just before the big interview, your gut experiences a wave of nausea as you see a dead animal beside the road.

I also briefly present about "kinesthetic sensations." We have a sense of whether we are in motion or at rest, whether we are squarely on both feet or awkwardly balancing on one leg, or whether we are swinging upside down from a noose trap—or we can even note the type of gait we are walking with.

I point out that, in particular, writers can be seen to use visceral and kinesthetic sensations in addition to the usual five senses and that these seem to be particularly useful types to know about as we write.

Lesson Two: What I Say to Students: What, How, Why

So, by the time we get to this key mini lesson on the craft of sensory detail, I have already taught at least one previous lesson in which the student

writers and I explore how the human senses work. Although we don't normally go through our day closely observing the sensory detail around us, two things are true about doing that.

One truth is that all we have to do to become more observant in this way is to decide to do so. If we say to ourselves, "I'm going to intensify my sensory noticing," and we practice doing that a bit, it is surprisingly easy for most people. The second truth is that very often when we do this, we get a feeling or understanding that we are improving the quality of our life—that we are, as the Buddhists would say, becoming more fully alive in the present moment.

Further, of course, sensory detail in our writing is what will allow our readers to experience the moments of our writing somewhat as if they are living through them with us. So, once reminded of this, learners usually are quick to see that there is value in noticing with the senses and to incorporating this noticing in their writing. With this established, I then move on to professional texts and authors as mentors for our work.

As I move to viewing parts of mentor texts, I note that though life occurs in events, it must be written about in moments. I also add this next point made by Flannery O'Connor in her book *Mystery and Manners*, essays gathered posthumously by her friends—a wonderful, though eccentric, writing advice book. At one point in the book, Flannery pictures herself sitting with a friend on her front porch in Georgia, discussing sensory detail. What she and her friend conclude is that if a writer is telling a story or example that they fervently wish for their reader to connect to, the writer should use at least three types of sensory detail. According to O'Connor, we may make the reader "handicapped" by only utilizing one sense (sight, perhaps) or two senses (sight *and* hearing, perhaps) in telling the story. O'Connor wants us to be aware that, for a sensory experience to be taken in lushly and richly, the reader could benefit from an appeal to at least three out of five senses or possibly four out of five or even all five.

I say further to my students that I took Flannery's advice here somewhat casually when I first read it; however, as I have continued to ponder her words in examining professional narrative texts, what I have seen is that I can virtually always note how a serious professional storyteller seems to understand and to follow this Flannery O'Connor "rule": "Any high-quality sensory description will probably include at least three out of five types of human senses."

Mentor Text Examples: Dialogic Presenting

(Page numbers not included for picture books, which often do not have page numbers.)

A Wrinkle in Time, by Madeleine L'Engle

The window rattled madly in the wind, and she pulled the quilt up close about her. Curled up on one of her pillows a gray fluff of kitten yawned, showing its pink tongue, tucked its head under again, and went back to sleep. (p. 9)

Up North at the Cabin, by Marsha Wilson Chall

> The boat roars forward;
> The tow line snaps tight.
> I leap from the water,
> Riding the waves.
> "Lean back!" they scream.
> How much? I think,
> Then smack the water
> Like an angry northern pike.
> I fall three times—
> A flip, a somersault, the splits.
> "Want to try again?" they ask.
> Papa skims the silver water
> On only one ski.
> "Yes!" I shout.

The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses, by Paul Goble

Every day when she had helped her mother carry water and collect firewood, she would run off to be with the horses. She stayed with them in the meadows, but was careful never to go beyond sight of home. …

[Note the sensory detail here:] One hot day when the sun was overhead she felt sleepy. She spread her blanket and lay down. It was nice to hear the horses eating and moving slowly among the flowers. Soon she fell asleep.

A faint rumble of distant thunder did not waken her. Angry clouds began to roll out across the sky with lightning flashing in the darkness beneath. But the fresh breeze and scent of rain made her sleep soundly.

brown girl dreaming, by Jacqueline Woodson

> My mother arrives in the middle of the night.
> And sleepily, we pile into her arms and hold tight.
>
> Her kiss on the top of my head reminds me
> Of all that I love.
>
> Mostly her.

It is late winter but my grandfather keeps the window in our room slightly open

So that the cold fresh air can move over us . . .

My mother tucks us back into our bed whispering,

We have a home up North now. (pp. 136-137)

Mama Makes Up Her Mind, by Bailey White

Every morning a boat from the local marine lab would pull up and anchor just off shore. People would wade around in the marsh grass with nets and spades and bottles. By the end of the first week the screen was bulged out from the pressure of Mama's binoculars. She didn't seem to understand that they did not give her the same dignity and distance she had been able to achieve with a telescope. We tried to reason with her. "They can see you, Mama," we hissed. But she just pressed the binoculars harder against the screen. (p. 10)

Dialogic Presenting

Having established the value of sensory detail through my explanations above and also having suggested the necessity of making use of at least three of the five senses in our own descriptive passages, I then usually go to the very short mentor-text example moment from Madeleine L'Engle's *Wrinkle in Time* enclosed here. I say, "This moment is from very early in the book. Meg is an eleven-year-old girl. Her father has already been captured and held prisoner by the bad guys of the book. Meg's room is in the attic, and there is a storm. Madeleine L'Engle wants us to feel fully how it is to be Meg, alone, worried about her father, feeling a bit defenseless herself, with the storm bashing at her family's house, so she writes this description."

I then read the description aloud for the first time, just allowing the listening student writers to be introduced to the passage. "Now, I'll read it again," I say, pausing after each clause or sentence to allow and invite students to note the different senses L'Engle is appealing to in her writing. Normally, the students are able to point out that "The window rattled madly in the wind" is sound. Then I demonstrate pulling an imaginary quilt about me as I read, "and she pulled the quilt close about her," helping the students to guess that this is touch. Then I read the entire longer second sentence at once: "Curled up on one of her pillows a gray fluff of kitten yawned, showing its pink tongue, tucked its head under again, and went back to sleep."

We note that this second sentence is entirely sight. There are actions—"curled" and "tucked its head under"—that are presented so as to help us visualize, and there are two colors—"*gray* fluff of kitten" and "*pink* tongue."

I then proceed to emphasize that L'Engle seems to know and to have taken to heart the Flannery O'Connor rule. In only two sentences here, L'Engle has maneuvered so as to include sound, touch, and sight. And we readers do feel the fear from the rattling window, the self-protective step of wrapping in the quilt, and the comfort of the friendly kitten nearby.

I never leave this passage, if it is the first time we have visited it, without saying, "In this passage from a master writer, we can draw two lessons for the price of one, so to speak, because not only does L'Engle show artfully how to follow the 'three types of senses' rule, but she also reveals to us that she sees the use of color as a key connecting device for the visual sense by including two colors in one sentence—gray and pink." I believe, and I note, that it is the pink tongue, most of all, that commands us to actually see that kitten as Meg sees it. So, not only are we guided to take the O'Connor rule seriously, but we are shown that if you want your reader to see something, tell them what color it is.

The other sensory detail examples may be explored in various ways. We can take up as a whole group the reading of one or two more and then leave the others for student writers to explore on their own. Or, as I prefer, we can have small groups focus on one passage each and report out to the whole group how each additional professional writing sample also uses three types of senses—following the rule.

In addition to *A Wrinkle in Time,* a novel for young people, the examples here are from two picture books (*Up North at the Cabin* and *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses*), one from an adolescent literature book (*brown girl dreaming*), and one adult book. Bailey White was a first-grade teacher in Florida when she first started writing essays about her mother and reading them on public radio, essays that were then collected into a book, *Mama Makes Up Her Mind.*

I have found all of these examples easily useable with all ages. Kindergartners can understand and benefit from all of them. College students react readily and positively to all five as well. The same is true for all ages in between. And the same is true for the mentor text examples throughout this book—they are meaningful and useable for all ages.

The *Up North at the Cabin* passage is full of interesting sensory stuff and vivid verbs that can be brought up now or in the vivid verbs lesson. "The boat roars forward" seems to echo L'Engle's idea of starting with sound. "The tow line snaps tight" usually leads to a bit of conversation (sound or touch?). It is sound for us as readers of the page but perhaps touch if we imagine ourselves as the one holding the rope. It is both, I think. Similarly, I think after the explanatory phrase "I fall three times," the types of falls ("a flip, a somersault, the splits") are visual for us as

readers of the page but perhaps kinesthetic if we have imagined ourselves into the skiing action.

It is not necessary for us to assert a right or wrong here. It is to the author's credit, and to the enrichment of our reading experience, if a sensory moment on the page resonates with more than one sensation.

In *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses*, a book I love, Paul Goble puts us in another intensely sensory moment. The "hot day" connects us with touch. The girl feeling "sleepy" brings out possible visceral sensations (droopy eyelids, slower breathing, etc.). She is able to "hear the horses eating," which means the day is very quiet.

The scene continues with sensations we experience, even though the girl only feels them subconsciously in her sleep—the sound of a "rumble," the sight of clouds that "roll out across the sky" and lightning that is "flashing" in the darkness. Even the light touch of a "fresh breeze" and the "scent of rain" do not awaken her. I count four senses here, at least: touch, sound, sight, and smell. Goble wants us to experience this transition from quiet to storm in a full and rich way, so he implements the O'Connor rule of three.

In *brown girl dreaming*, we have a moment when Mama has been gone for some time, preparing for the family to move from South Carolina to Ohio, and partly because our main character is still a little girl, she has missed her very much. When Mama arrives home we again have at least three senses in our scene. Touch is the most intimate of the five senses. When someone speaks to us, we still feel we can keep our distance if we wish. But when someone touches us, the touch tends to either be negative (if we don't feel close to the person emotionally) or reassuring and calming (if we love the person). This passage between people who love each other fully is full of warm and reassuring touch—"we pile into her arms and hold tight" and "her kiss on the top of my head reminds me" are intimate, familiar, loving moments of touch. We see the window open, letting the breeze in, and we hear Mama speak in a whisper. Whispering is also intimate: "We have a home up North now."

With *Mama Makes Up Her Mind*, Bailey White also gets our varied senses going. Technically, White may only utilize two types of senses directly. We see the men in the marsh grass and also Mama, with her binoculars against the screen. And since quotation marks allow us to hear off of the page, we hear someone speak: " 'They can see you, Mama,' we hissed."

However, because of White's subtle use of just the right verbs, other senses are also engaged. When people "wade around in marsh grass" the line resonates with our own experiences of wading and adds a sense of touch, or even a kinesthetic layer, to the scene. Further, the final sentence

about Mama, who "pressed the binoculars harder against the screen," also engages our sense of touch—because we know in our remembered experience what it feels like to press against a screen.

If you feel I am getting a bit far afield here, feel free to get off the train at any point. I have, however, never had a student disagree with me about the multiple types of senses called up by the White passage.

Where the Calico Cat Comes In

In my mind, each lesson I am writing about here has at least two teachers: the main teacher who is in the classroom with the students—you—and then any mentor coaches who are on the printed page or video. Here is where the calico cat comes in. As I stated in chapter 2, the underlying understanding of each lesson is that I, as a guest teacher of the lesson, am also writing a narrative essay; in my case, the essay is about my calico cat, Mama.

So, as guest teacher, I am also writing a paper. As actual classroom teacher, you must be writing a paper too. And just as I elaborate "how to" apply these craft lessons by giving the example of how I might apply them to my piece about Mama, the cat, so also must you clarify in your lessons how you intend to try to utilize each craft step in the writing piece that you are working on.

Students need two types of models: professional, fully realized models (such as professional literary texts) and also, just as importantly, models of "on the way," which can be provided by my work on my piece about the calico cat, your work on your own piece of writing, and also examples from the student writers in the room.

In this case, for my part, I present here in the lesson the two short writings with which I began this chapter—first, a short passage that is, in essence, a freewrite about the calico cat—some rambling thinking out loud and some not-yet-organized telling of parts of her story.

And second, I present my sensory detail example moment (on the bottom of that page) in which, as I say to the student writers, "I am trying to be like Madeleine L'Engle" (or like any of the other writers I have been discussing here). I usually read the calico cat "detail" passage aloud without pausing. Then I invite the student writers to pore over it on their own or in pairs and to report back to me aloud in a few moments the different senses they see being engaged by my extended moment with Mama.

The passage begins and ends with touch, I think: "soft and smooth" fur at the start, "weight resting against my chest" in the end. I announce that I can "smell" the "dust," and that I can "hear" her "start to purr." Perhaps announcing each sense is not the most subtle or artistic way to get the

senses going. However, I rarely get any objection or hesitation in readers because of these little announcements. I think this is because the readers get the feeling that the details are sincere and authentic.

The cat's "dark eyes" are visual. I get all carried away describing her orange "color," having taken to heart L'Engle's implicit advice to utilize color. Normally, readers enjoy this elaboration on her orange color—and it helps emphasize this technique. So, I count four types of senses here: touch, smell, sound, and sight. We do not have taste. Taste can be a good sense to use. However, I sometimes say to very young students, "Be careful what you taste." There may be a kinesthetic sensation of the cat positioned so as to be resting against my chest.

Student Task: Have a Go—Students Doing

The next step is the student task. The students are asked to have a go at this craft technique themselves. My instructions are that, just as I did, they are to try to "be" Madeleine L'Engle for a moment in relation to writing with sensory detail. As they do so, they are also to implement the rule of three, or, in other words, to write a passage that incorporates at least three different types of senses.

To do this, the students are asked to select—from the paper they are writing over time—a "moment" that they will need to tell in detail in order to make this piece of writing as good as possible. We are not concerned with choosing a moment from near the beginning of the piece. I often say, "Choose what feels like an especially important moment to tell," or, "Choose a moment that comes vividly to your brain—as if this moment wants to be written."

Possible moments to choose might include:

- how it all started;
- how it all ended up;
- the best moment;
- the worst moment; or
- a turning point (where things turn for either the better or the worse)

This list, of course, not only serves as a list to select from for this craft lesson experiment, but also as a list the students can return to in order to gather other moments they may need to tell so they can produce a complete and completely engaging piece.

Each student then—right then, during the class session—is asked to quickly write, or "spill out onto paper," this moment they have chosen to

tell in full sensory detail. I say, "Do not introduce us to this moment. Do not explain about it to us. Do not worry about concluding. Just tell the moment itself as directly as possible in as full sensory detail as possible—using at least three types of senses."

The obvious way to try to get at least three senses is simply to pause as needed in your writing and to silently ask yourself, "What was I seeing, hearing, smelling, touching, and/or tasting at the exact moment I am now writing about?" If nothing comes to mind through this silent self-questioning, we probably have a case of either choosing a wrong moment or perhaps a case of a struggling writer, who is still perhaps in the grip of fear from trauma. Sometimes, by circulating around the room to confer with a student in difficulty—or by simply pausing to ask a student "What else happened?"—you can boost a student past hesitation into writing.

I always tell the students that there is a mini lesson "rule" here—as well as the Flannery O'Connor rule. The lesson rule is that when I teach a craft step, they must try it. I have chosen the craft work carefully, and I want them to actively investigate how the craft step might help their writing. So, whether to try the step is not a choice; it is an expectation.

I add, however, that if they do not like the results of their experiment, they do not need to put the craft experiment into their paper. They can simply file it away in their writing folder as "something they practiced." Further, I say, "My side of this rule that you have to try things is that I will always help you. I am not your judge, waiting to see if you can do it. I am your coach, who is going to help you do it."

Sharing Out in a Safe Environment

At the end of our craft-practice work period, if time is short, the teacher can simply say, "We need two students who will be willing to read aloud their sensory detail moments they just wrote. Who will volunteer?" Normally, there are some students who feel successful with this craft step and who, perhaps with coaxing, are ready to read to their peers.

When the readers read aloud, I lead our group response with three successive questions—questions that represent the first two parts of the PQS protocol presented in chapter 3. First, "What do you remember best from this sensory detail moment after you hear it?" Or, put another way, "What stays in your memory best from this moment after you have heard it read aloud?" Any words, events, or details that people can remember are all accepted equally—but we must try to refer to specific places or words in the piece.

Second, I ask, "Which of the five senses do you notice being used in this passage—and where?" We walk through the passage again, noticing

this. If, at this point, group members wish to hear the writing sample read aloud again to get it freshly in mind, that is just fine. I always invite listeners to respond by saying, if they need to, "Please read that again."

Third, I ask, "Now, based just on this sensory moment that you have heard, what are you curious or confused about in relation to the story being told? What questions do you have for the writer?" I only allow two to five questions to be generated. Too many questions lead to clutter and confusion, and they also begin to seem like critique, where supportive response is desired. I often will ask also what I feel is my best question—a question that speaks to something centrally important or to how it all turned out—attempting to model being as serious as possible when we ask questions.

Something I handle quite definitely as I guide this sharing out is the use of the questions. Before any questions are asked, I always say, "The writer will not answer this question right now. The question is for the writer to consider later in regard to whether to answer the question in their piece of writing, or not." Although at times the writer is briefly frustrated by not being invited to answer right then, I do feel that not answering causes the energy of the question to flow back into the piece of writing, rather than being played out in class. Of course, when the questioner or writer are quite exasperated by this not-answering rule, I will make an exception and pause in our work to allow for an answer aloud right at the time.

We might discuss with the group at this point what we can learn by reflecting on our other group members' writing experiments. What does their writing teach us that we might also try in our own pieces in the future?

This can be the entire sharing out, or one-on-one response sessions can follow, or small group sessions in which the readers and responders attempt to repeat and reiterate the sharing-out pattern of the whole group session. I suggest that we all understand that the writer is free afterward to incorporate answers to our questions in their piece—or not to include answers. It is for the writer to decide if answering the question will serve their purpose in writing.

Discourse Review: Restorative Conversations

I have partly been remarking on how trauma-informed practices are included as I have unfolded this sensory detail craft lesson above, by showing how I discuss the mentor texts dialogically with the students and by indicating how I use the PQS format for responding. In addition, by incorporating the section "What I Say to Students: What, How, Why" I am addressing the three brain levels of understanding that not only provide a

rationale for the craft step for all students but also offer an understanding particularly helpful to students who have experienced trauma. By incorporating the have a go practice step within each lesson, we are including the "doing" that Craig also recommends.

In coaching what types of questions might be most helpful, I stress that our questions should be matters of our curiosity about the characters or events, or confusion about what is going on, what led to this moment, or how it all turned out. I give this guidance because these types of questions focus on the writing as communication and offer the writer an interested—and curious—responder, as opposed to questions that are disguised critique. As I say in chapter 3, we want to work away from questions that are really judgments, such as, "Why did you choose to write about something like this?"

At this point, a writing attempt that begins the trial-and-error process of learning a new craft step is to be listened to, praised, and supported. Hattie and Timperley's research, also mentioned in chapter 3, explains the lack of usefulness of "pointing out what's wrong" at the early stages of a process and the greater usefulness of pointing out where the process is on track and what step might come next. If the students are helped to take the risk of trying on a new craft move, and if they are made to feel safe and supported in that work, they will then be brave enough to continue to work toward refinement.

Common Misstep: Supportive Coaching Moves

Let me briefly offer an example of a writing event that all teachers experience: After the sensory detail lesson, a student may write a lot of detail about a less important moment and then underdevelop a key or highly relevant moment.

In a story about spending the day with her sister, for example, a writer might inadvertently get drawn into overdeveloping the sister's arrival. Of course, if the arrival moment was central or key, it may be worthy of full development. Or the writer might overdevelop a moment of getting and eating pizza when, in fact, there were other moments in the day that represented the greatest fun or other moments in the day that showed how the day brought them closer emotionally.

When the error of offering much detail about something that may not warrant such emphasis occurs, we want teacher and peers to maintain a positive environment for risk-taking and experiments by following the PQS protocol. This protocol involves pointing out what the writer *has* achieved so far toward the purpose. In this case, the writer is achieving the

purpose of employing lush amounts of detail—a valuable practice step for future writing. Further, the writer is employing detail in an authentic piece of writing meaningful to the writer—also the writing realm we wish for the writer to be operating in. The writer can be praised for both of these steps, as well as for putting their effort into practicing the use of the craft of detail.

As mentioned just above, unfolding the "Q" part of our response with sincere questions may provide the writer advice for what other scenes they might employ. "I am curious about what you feel is the most important moment of the day for you and your sister?" or, "As you look back on this day, what made it so very special to you?" are questions that may help the writer to focus on even more relevant scenes they might present in fuller detail. Having offered such questions, teacher or peers can proceed to suggest "one more" moment that could be developed.

We can support gradual movement toward good decision-making in selecting which scenes to tell with a guide sheet something like the one I provide below.

Guide Sheet: Selecting a Scene-Moment to Describe in Sensory Detail

In making use of the craft step of sensory detail to deepen the reader's experience of your piece of writing, there are two core steps: 1) selecting the most relevant and useful scene to tell and 2) telling that scene in lush sensory detail.

Making these decisions effectively involves practice, reader feedback, and use of the writer's intuition. There is no rule to guide us on this.

Here are some moments in an experience that are often helpful to include—in full sensory detail. Perhaps not all of these moments would be included, but treating this list as a set of possible options can help writers make good choices.

Some possible scenes:

1) How it all began or when you first noticed or experienced this.
2) A turning point moment—when things turned for the worse or for the better.
3) A best moment or worst moment.
4) Or a "typical" moment—one that shows "how it was."
5) A resolution moment—how it ended.
6) Or picture for your reader the "afterward"—a moment that shows how your life was changed—for the better or for the worse.

Latino Writing Club--Rosa's Story

This classroom story is something that happened while I was one of the teachers of an ongoing school writing activity for third through fifth graders that we called Latino Writing Club.

I will provide a bit of background while also trying to keep a long story short. I was the college writing consultant and one of three teachers on the team. We formed the club because, in our community, about 30 to 40 percent of the students were Latino, mostly Mexican American, whose first language in the home was Spanish. We found that when these elementary students transitioned out of their ESL or ELL class into the mainstream classroom, they were, though not through anyone's intention, almost perfectly set up for failure. Although they could now speak conversational English, they still had great difficulty with "textbook English," and they had difficulty whenever writing was called for. They could not effectively write answers to questions at the end of the chapter, and they had difficulty with other writing tasks as well.

We felt that if we could put them in a supportive environment in which they were helped to try things in writing without risk, they then might be able to grow their comfort and ability with writing. Over time, then, they might avoid being judged in their home classrooms as bad writers or as disinterested students when, in fact, they were simply students who were struggling with the language.

This all worked fairly well. The students got nifty new notebooks and pens, and we provided treats at the end of every session. Plus, each of them was helped, through life-map work, to choose a topic for a paper that they would write and revise and then present by reading aloud to a gathering of parents and friends at the school. Further, they were promised, and received, a field trip to the local small college, where they once again got to read their papers to a gathering of students and faculty, have lunch with college students, and engage in a question-and-answer session with the president of the college.

Even though membership in the "club" was pretty much required of the students, they quickly came to see it as a gift to them. After a first round of sessions over a few months in which students chose mostly to not write about their own culture, they began to loosen up and write about whatever moved them. We got to hear and read about someone's mother teaching two girls how to make delicious posole. When I read aloud from a book called *Up North at the Cabin* (a mentor text in the above chapter) about a little girl who goes up north to her grandparents' cabin on a lake, one of the boys piped up, "I go south!" He then proceeded to tell us about trips with his mother, father, and siblings to visit their extended family in Mexico.

When we missed a session, the next time Maria, a fourth grader, would say, "Long time no see," with a bit of accusation in her voice. And, she also volunteered, during treats time of one session, "Too bad not everyone can be in Writing Club."

Still, there were challenges. Here is one of them from one day. Everyone in the room was working on the task—assigned to us by the craft lesson taught at the beginning of our session—adding sensory detail (whatever occurred to them via their vision, hearing, taste, touch, and smell) during one important moment of a brief memoir each of us—teachers and students—was writing. I had paused in my own writing in order to move about the room to help individual students.

I noticed Rosa, one of our struggling writers, who was sitting passively and not writing. I was familiar with Rosa as reluctant to try any new craft lesson in her work. I was not sure if this was because she was a third grader and therefore intimidated a bit by being in with fourth and fifth graders, or if she had been dealt a negative classroom experience I was not aware of, or if, maybe, her English was simply not as fluid yet as some others.

Anyway, as I walked up to her, she leaned forward, forming an "X" over her paper with her arms, and said, "I'm all done."

I sat down in the empty chair next to her and said, "Well, you are not all done, because this is the paper each of us chose to work on to make it our best writing so we can read it aloud to your parents and friends. We are going to work on this paper for a while longer," I assured her.

"However," I said, "Maria and I will help you think of some sensory details for your paper." Maria (the same fourth grader mentioned above) was comfortable with herself and her writing, and she was seated on the other side of Rosa. She readily put down her pen and turned her attention to Rosa and me.

In a short time, the three of us successfully brainstormed a nice collection of details from the moment Rosa was telling about—being treated for a hand injury in the doctor's office. We helped her remember what the doctor said, what her father said, what the room smelled like, and the fear and pain of the shot she needed.

Even though I was pleased with how Rosa opened up and allowed Maria and me to help her, I was surprised when, at sharing time that day, Rosa was the first to raise her hand and volunteer to read her sensory details aloud to the whole group. Our responses in sharing time, as suggested by the PQS protocol, were to note first what we liked and what was memorable about the person's writing, after which we might ask a question or two focusing on what we were still curious to know about the story.

I was further surprised when, at the next session a week later, during the time when we were all trying to write three possible new beginnings for our papers, Rosa appeared beside me with her writing materials. I was not at her work table, so she had come over to mine. There was no seat for her, but I allowed her to stand right next to me. I acknowledged her with a positive nod and a smile, nonverbally indicating to her that she was welcome. I anticipated that she would soon ask me a question or ask me for help with her leads—this would be fine with me, as I would see her desire for coaching to be a positive step. However, as the work session wore on, she simply continued to write in her notebook while standing next to me.

When writing time was over, she went back to her seat. And during sharing time, she was once again the first to raise her hand to volunteer to share her attempts at new leads.

I think the first lesson from this story is one of life's oldest lessons: People most often do not take some challenging next step because they are afraid. This is true for our students in the classroom, and it is true for us in life.

If we wish to be of use as teachers to students who are fearful, we can act as someone who is willing to provide nurturing instead of judgment, help instead of evaluation, coaching instead of rejection.

Rosa had learned from that one session where Maria and I had helped her that being next to me was a safe space where she could try new things without being judged—a space where she could get help if she needed it, without being dealt any evaluation or rejection.

Even as early as the session after the help session, she had adapted so that she could freely try new steps with her writing. She still wanted the safety net of being near me, a safety net I was more than happy to provide. Next time she appeared beside me during a work session, I pulled up a chair for her.

Reflection On Rosa

I have reflected on the lesson for us teachers from my experience with Rosa above. I would only add that of the trauma symptoms—fight, flight, or freeze—Rosa was first exhibiting being frozen (unable to proceed) and then attempting to flee (by covering her paper). In both cases, the cause was the same: fear (of failure or judgment). And in both cases, the restorative response is the same: communicating caring toward her and gently coaching and scaffolding her to a next step.

*TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING TIP #1—ESTABLISH A QUIET PLACE

WHAT

A simple but powerful calming step a teacher can take to help students who are in grief, or who are stressed or anxious, is to establish a Quiet Place in the room from the very start of the school year, before any student needs it. This can simply be a desk or reasonably comfortable chair that is either in a private space or at least set a little bit away from the group. The more private the space, the better—and the more separate from the working classroom. However, the teacher can make clear that even though the Quiet Place may be located in the busyness of the room, classmates are to respect that the student is in a meditative space and to be left in peace. Note: This chair or space is not used as a punishment place.

WHY

When the teacher notices, or when a student reports, that a student is feeling overwhelmed with sorrow, grief, or anxiety, the teacher can suggest, or the student can request, to sit for a while in the Quiet Place. Sometimes, the student may show up at school highly stressed and unable to function. We could respond by blaming them, or we could respond restoratively, helping them to regain their calm and their ability to attend to learning. Sometimes, students experience tragedy or sorrow in their lives that causes them to carry stress over time and to need to be in a Quiet Place as part of many school days. Sometimes, something that happens at school can be so stressful for a student that they need the protection of a Quiet Place to give them relief.

HOW

The student should be encouraged to take their writing or their notebook to this space if they wish. In this space they can write whatever they need or wish to write in their notebook, perhaps talking out their sorrow or grief on paper, for example. Or it may help the student to just close their eyes so as to rest and recover. Or there are additional calming steps the student can take (which we will take up in a short lesson after chapter 7).

The rule for a Quiet Place is one-at-a-time. However, often, more than one student needs such a space, so backup or additional options are needed.

I present the idea of a Quiet Place here for an additional reason. Sometimes, when students write the sensory detail moment of a sorrowful experience (one of the options of the previous chapter), this can bring out powerful emotions or even tears. This is healthy. Grieving in relation to sorrow or great sadness is a healing experience and not to be avoided. However, when it becomes a little overwhelming in the moment for a particular student, the option of going to a Quiet Place can make all the difference.

CHAPTER 6

Craft Lesson #3: Metaphors

When you are grateful for the presence of the other you ignite the holy sparks in them.

—the Kabbalah

Metaphor, Defined

A metaphor is a comparison between two unlike things. If you compare one building to another, that is not a metaphor—that is simply comparison. If you compare a building to an elephant, that is a metaphor. Usually, writers use the term "metaphor" for both metaphor, which doesn't use the words "like" or "as," and for simile, which does use "like" or "as."

You can use metaphors to help your readers better see how important or terrible or beautiful some experience was. You know how difficult it is sometimes to really get across to your reader that something that happened was so important or that something felt awful or that something was the best ever. That is what metaphors can help us do—clarify for a reader just exactly "how" something was when we experienced it. Here are some examples:

- The car seemed like a giant monster trying to trample him.
- She was so scared she held on to her aunt the way a baby monkey clings to its mother.
- Going to the fun park felt like traveling to a magic city where anything could happen.
- His mother's black hair felt as soft as a bird's feathers to his fingers.
- Her friend's facial expression grew tight and angry—she could sense the cloud of bad feelings rolling in to ruin her sunny day.

Three Possible Metaphors for the Calico Cat Essay (Which Do You Like Best?)

1. Trying to give the calico cat away was like offering people spoiled lettuce from your refrigerator for their dinner salad. They twisted their mouths in a very sour way and looked at you as if to say, "Huh? You think I'm stupid or something?"
2. Seeing the calico cat on my back deck when I got home from work was like confirming the relatives have not gone home yet. It's like there's your old Uncle Barney, and you think, *Doesn't he have somewhere to go, something to do?* But, really, you know he doesn't have anywhere to go, and besides, he needs a friend.
3. When a stray calico cat comes into your life, unexpected and unwanted, it is almost as if "someone up there" has put a test of conscience in your path. You don't want to take the test, and you

don't want to deal with the cat. She is inconvenient. She is in the way. She is certainly—and at least—one cat too many (since we have three cats in our house already). And yet, you feel that if you just walk away and go on with your life, you have failed the test.

Introduction: Metaphors

As I begin this chapter on metaphor, I am thinking several thoughts. I would put metaphor next (as lesson 3 on Craft, after Getting Topics, and after Sensory Detail) because it is probably the most imaginative writing device we are going to teach our students and, therefore, very important. Alternatively, metaphor need not necessarily be taught next—it may fit well at almost any point along the way—even as a last step of revision before considering the piece of writing "done."

However, I think a lot of teachers put off the teaching of metaphor—almost permanently put it off—because they feel that they do not know how to teach it well or that their students are not ready for it. In my visits to many schools over the years, I have found that statements about how "the students are not ready for X" are often one of the weakest rationalizations of teachers for not giving students their best chance to learn important things.

As I write, I am less than one week removed from my recent session in which I taught metaphors to a group of second graders while being observed by their teacher and several other early elementary teachers from that building. I gave the lesson that day not so very differently than I am about to describe it here. I will admit that, when I teach metaphor use to younger children, I sometimes visualize myself as one of those cliff divers in a tourist spot who make a long dive to the sea while trying to miss the nearby rocks.

However, I remind myself that the stakes are really not so high. If the students do not grasp the full craft step in this lesson, I can give further lessons on this topic in which the students have a go at it.

In my recent second-grade session, after I gave the lesson offered here, I would say 75 to 80 per cent of the class did, indeed, have at least one useful metaphor for their paper that they were working on. And I have full confidence that if the teacher and I continue to teach metaphor, by displaying examples from children's literature and by allowing kids to share ones they have come up with, the success rate in the room will grow quickly. And yes, I readily accept approximations—metaphors that are not golden for that paper or comparisons that do not stretch quite all the way

to metaphor. All attempts are praised as sharing in our efforts and as brave steps to try a new technique.

I start out by arguing/explaining that metaphors are more important than perhaps we sometimes realize. Longinus, the ancient Greek philosopher, said, "Metaphor is the most cogent of figures because it sweeps us off our feet." Arthur Koestler (1964), perhaps the most important psychologist of creativity of the twentieth century, presented what he called "bisociation" (relating two unlike things in order to achieve an essential insight) as the most important creative thought—the most important act of imagination.

If you are a reader or writer of poetry, you probably realize that metaphor is one of the fundamental poetic devices. Shakespeare is often considered the greatest writer of all time. It is no accident his sonnets are filled with metaphors. When he compares aging to the late autumn, when few leaves remain on the trees, and to evening, when little light is left of the day, he both achieves essential insight and also stirs our emotional connection to the topic.

What I Say to Students: What, How, Why

I did actually mention Longinus and Arthur Koestler to the second graders—just very briefly as I did above. I wanted them to know right off that some very thoughtful people think that metaphors are important. Why are they important? I say to the students that maybe more than any other writing step, we can use metaphors to help us share with the reader the emotional "feeling" of what something is like. I then read aloud the opening remarks defining metaphor that appeared at the outset of this chapter.

I then usually share some further examples out loud. I say, "If I said, 'She is like a black widow spider—beautiful but poisonous to be around,' that would be a metaphor. Or, if I said, 'He is like a tiger when he gets to the school dance, stalking his prey (the person he wants to dance with) through the jungle of human bodies, until he is ready to pounce (by asking her if she will dance),' that is also a metaphor. In fact, in that second case, I have extended the metaphor a bit by developing the 'jungle' idea."

Mentor Text Examples: Dialogic Presenting

Now, as usual, I move to literary texts as our first mentor texts, with the express intention of inviting the students to "think and talk" with me about them.

The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses, by Paul Goble

> The horses galloped faster and faster, pursued by the thunder and lightning. They swept like a brown flood across hills and through valleys. Fear drove them on and on, leaving their familiar grazing grounds far behind.
>
> At last the storm disappeared over the horizon. The tired horses slowed and then stopped and rested. Stars came out and the moon shone over hills the girl had never seen before. She knew they were lost.

I offer here the distinctive metaphor from *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses* about how the stampeding wild horses were "like a brown flood." Also, when Goble writes that the horses were "pursued" by the thunder, that makes the thunder into something that has a desire—like a person who might have a desire to pursue. That, of course, is called personification. In personification, something in nature is described as if it has feelings and motivation like a human. Metaphors and personification are part of the family of language usage known as figures of speech. Here, I recommend that we consider personification as a kind of metaphor for our writing purposes. Then I offer the cluster of metaphors from the "moose page" of *Up North at the Cabin*.

Up North at the Cabin, by Marsha Wilson Chall

> Like a house on stilts,
> A bull moose stands in the shallows.
> His chest heaves and rumbles,
> Mighty as a diesel engine.
> He shakes his great head,
> Rocking branches of bone
> As he bellows a warning.

Whereas I would just present and explain the metaphors from *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses* above, I would invite the students to try for insights in this next example. I might ask, "Can you help me explain *how* a moose is like a house on stilts?" They might guess, or I might explain, " 'Like a house on stilts' helps us visualize the moose—large-bodied but on thin legs." The "diesel engine" sound can help us hear the moose—I ask, "Do you know of things that have a diesel engine?" to see if there is prior knowledge in the room, and/or I explain to early elementary kids that the big trucks on the highway usually have diesel engines. The "branches of bone" is my favorite part. I say to the students, "A moose does not really have branches. What does have branches?" And they readily respond that trees have branches. The antlers on the moose are so large that they seem like tree branches—a nice metaphor.

Then, of course, any number of additional pieces of literature that contain interesting metaphors can be used at this time. I include the additional example below, *The Fiddler of the Northern Lights*, in my usual lesson.

The Fiddler of the Northern Lights, by Natalie Kinsey-Warnock

> The song that poured from the fiddle was as sweet and clear as a mountain stream. As it flowed out into the night, filling up the dark spaces of the sky, the Northern Lights started to dance.

This page includes the metaphor of sound being "as sweet and clear as a mountain stream." Comparing sound to a mountain stream flowing is a nice metaphor, but when the author uses the term "sweet," she is also giving the stream a "taste." We can, especially for younger students, just call this a metaphor. However, for older students, we can clarify that when you use one sense (in this case "sweet," as in "sweet taste") to call up another sense ("sound" of the violin), this is called synesthesia. Of course, this passage also has a metaphor that contains personification when the sound of the fiddle causes the Northern Lights (a part of nature) to "dance" (which is something humans do). Dialogically, I might say to the students, "This text contains personification also—I know I just taught this to you a minute ago, but is there someone who can try to help me explain *how* there is personification here?"

Ellington Was Not a Street, by Ntozake Shange (illustrations by Kader Nelson)

> [two examples]
> "politics as necessary as collards"
>
> "our doors opened like our daddy's arms
> held us safe & loved"

These are two metaphors from a poetry and picture book that, though it refers to Duke Ellington, the great American composer, in the title, is more about a house Ntozake Shange grew up in during a time when racism dictated where you could live. The book pays tribute to a number of African American men (Paul Robeson, W. E. B. Du Bois, and others) of that era who individually and together fought against racism and fought for the freedom of all people. The "politics as necessary as collards" metaphor clarifies with amazingly few words how, if you are part of an oppressed group, then politics is always something you need to confront to try to make things different—politics become as common as dinner. And "our doors opened like our daddy's arms" captures with one statement/metaphor how their house was a warm, loving, receiving kind of place to all of these men, and how also, at the same time as her father fought politically for justice, he managed to be open and loving to his daughter at home.

The House on Mango Street, by Sandra Cisneros

> From "Hips"
>
> "They bloom like roses."
>
> And, " 'That's to lullaby it,' Nenny says, 'that's to rock the baby to sleep inside you.'" (p. 50)

Sandra Cisneros is using metaphors to talk about the adolescent girl experience of suddenly growing hips. First, it is as if they "bloom like roses" because they are an entirely natural result of the girl growing into physical maturity (blooming). Next, Cisneros talks about how having hips changes the way you walk, with a little sway, as if each hip wanted to go in a different direction. And her "Nenny" explains that, once pregnant, this swaying walk will soothe the baby, just like singing a lullaby to a newborn. Of course, lullaby is a metaphor made into a verb action here also, which makes it more unusual as a word use.

With two simple metaphors Cisneros clarifies the positive factual and emotional qualities of an adolescent girl growing hips. It is perfectly natural—and a good thing—like when a rose blooms, it comes into its full beauty. And, it changes your walk—but for a good purpose—in a way that helps you automatically comfort the baby inside you when you become pregnant.

To pursue this lesson dialogically I can simply call attention to a particular short passage from any of the included mentor texts above, and invite the students, in pairs perhaps, to go on a "metaphor hunt" in the passage for examples of metaphor—and then ask them to explain their findings.

I have found—as I have said earlier—that early elementary learners can grasp picture-book examples, but I have found also that all students from early elementary onward, including college, seem to enjoy the picture book examples as well. I will sometimes say, if I am feeling insecure about using picture books with older students, "Picture books are my easiest and quickest way to show you what I mean about this writing technique." I have never had students react against this picture-book approach to mentor examples. Of course, it is always possible to utilize age-related examples, too, as I also do.

Where the Calico Cat Comes In

Then I move to my own writing in the form of my continuing work on my calico cat essay. I share the three metaphors from the beginning of this chapter and partly repeated here, with just a bit of commentary.

> Trying to give the calico cat away was like offering people spoiled lettuce from your refrigerator for their dinner salad. …

> Seeing the calico cat on my back deck when I got home from work was like confirming that the relatives have not gone home yet. …
>
> When a stray calico cat comes into your life, unexpected …

Having briefly shared and explained each of these metaphors, I invite the class of students to note that these are just experimental attempts on my part, and I ask them to vote by raising their hands as I review the three possible metaphors, suggesting that perhaps I would include the one they select as the best in my paper. The "spoiled lettuce" and "Uncle Barney" metaphors have won the votes about equally often. I'm not sure the "test of conscience" has ever won. I suppose it may be a bit too abstract to be a great metaphor. By asking which metaphor the students might choose as the best and by allowing them to speak about this a bit, I get a dialogic exchange going in which, in an entirely nonthreatening interchange, the students begin to further characterize both what makes a metaphor and also what might make an especially good one.

Student Task: Have a Go—Students Doing

Because trying out metaphors is more difficult than trying out almost all of the other craft lessons, and because we want students to feel as helped as possible with this, I offer extra and special scaffolding at this moment. Of course, our scaffolding choices are important because they address the *how* issue for student writers: "How am I going to …?" (in this case, get a workable metaphor). I assert to students that often comparisons related to nature are a relatively easy and powerful way to get your mind going with metaphors. And then we walk through the "Metaphor Ideas: Guide Sheet," with the students trying each one—as I try it, too—in our notebooks or journals or notepads. This becomes our first step of "have a go" with metaphors. It provides a shared group activity (in which each of us is also writing)— to launch our "have a go."

Metaphor Ideas: Guide Sheet

If you are writing about a person, place, or event …

1. What kind of **animal** are you reminded of? A fierce one, a shy one?
2. What kind of **plant**? A tree? A flower? A weed? A cornstalk?
3. What kind of **weather**? Cold and rainy? Warm and sunny?
4. What **season** of the year? Spring, summer, fall, winter?
5. What type of **other place** are you reminded of? Prison? A castle? A church? A desert?

For question 1—what kind of animal—I suggest comparing a person to a type of animal that captures their personality or usual mood, or that will carry the mood of the situation they are in: trapped, lost, soaring, or stalking. If the topic of the paper is a place, the animal comparison can still work. A place also has a friendly or unfriendly mood. If the topic of the paper is an animal, they can compare the animal to a type of person, and that can work out well too.

For question 2—what kind of plant—I suggest that the writers try a metaphor or two that will show the beauty, fragility, role in the group, or stage of development that the person, event, or place has. For example, you might consider whether the person is seeming to shrivel up like a plant with no water. Or is the person blooming beautifully like a flower in spring? Does the person protect others the way a great oak shades its ground?

For question 3—what kind of weather—what kind of feeling or mood or set of good or bad possibilities does the person bring into the room when they enter, or what feelings or possibilities arise when people arrive at the place or when the event begins? I might say, "My father was a good man, but he tended to bring 'partly cloudy' into the room with him."

For question 4—what season of the year—many of the same possibilities exist as with question 3, the weather. Spring carries with it a whole set of feelings and possibilities, as do fall and the other seasons. There are subtle variations possible, such as suggesting a transition from one season to another or a back-and-forth between seasons: "One day, my friend is as warming as late springtime, but the next day, he might be cold as December."

For question 5 on the sheet—what type of other place—I try to suggest that certain places have dramatic associations that can add helpful drama to our writing. I have had students write quite successfully about how being in school felt like being in prison, how arriving at a luxurious place for the first time felt like arriving at a castle, how a certain moment felt worthy of prayer or seemed sobering and serious—like being in church—or how a certain hard period in their life felt like being lost in the desert.

* * *

Another Example

Because I am always writing with the students, working on a piece of writing as they are, I recently was working on a piece about my mother while a classroom of tenth graders was also working on their life-map-based pieces I had gotten them started on. As we worked on the metaphor craft

lesson, I shared with them my attempts at the above list of five possible metaphor categories. In each numbered step, I shared my "mother" attempt first, in an effort to prime the pump of their thinking. Here they are:

1. **Animal**—my mother in a nursing home—"Behind her eyes, I felt I could see a helpless baby bird or maybe a chipmunk poised and afraid, wishing it could run away."
2. **Plant**—my mother in a nursing home—"All those years, like a sunflower, with her bright and sunny disposition, she had provided for her family. Now, she seemed a neglected house plant, parched from lack of water."
3. **Weather**—mother in general—"She was changeable and could easily go from sunny one moment to darkening skies the next."
4. **Season**—mother in general—"Like autumn, she was usually warm and bright, but if you hurt her feelings, you would soon feel a chill in the air." (I realize my weather and season metaphors are almost the same—this is just my quick have a go, remember.)
5. **Some Other Type of Place**—mother in general—"Being with her was like walking in a garden of fragile flowers: You could get the joy of colorful blossoms all around you, but you had to be careful where you stepped because you could hurt something."

* * *

In this activity, after we have all tried to come up with about five metaphors, or maybe ten (one or two for each of the five categories above), we move on to select a metaphor to try in our paper. However, remember, if each student can think of even one metaphor for two or three of the categories in the metaphor ideas guide, we are already nicely launched. It is not necessary for everyone to "get something" from each category.

With older students right then, or perhaps in the next lesson on metaphors for younger students, I then teach a bit more about the extended metaphor. I review aloud the metaphor story mentioned above about the tiger, reminding of the way I extended the tiger/jungle idea, "I could say he arrived at the dance like a tiger and looked around, stalking his prey. He paced slowly through the jungle of prom guests. Then, after pausing beside the punch bowl, he pounced by asking her to dance." I am quick to add that we do not really want to think of other people as our "dinner." This is just a way to add a sense of fun and adventure to the scene. Students are generally quick to get this tiger-and-jungle example about the school dance.

Then, as another example, I read aloud my poem, "The Visit," an extended metaphor comparing the obnoxious starlings at my bird-feeding station to a stereotypic hoodlum motorcycle gang.

After my read-aloud, the students and I trace out how the poem extends the comparison as the lines of the poem unfold. The birds "are" a motorcycle gang and behave like one. (Of course, I tell them I am thinking more of a rough motorcycle gang like those often portrayed in the movies and not thinking about the insurance executive who lives down the street and rides a motorcycle to work.) I launch the dialogic moment by explaining the initial metaphor comparison—as I have been doing here. However, at least at one or two points, I invite the students to speculate how the starlings or motorcyclists might behave so as to fit the comparison—how does what the starlings do mimic what the gang does? Even if only one or two students get this metaphorical move well enough to coexplain it with me, that is still much more engaging and dialogic than a teacher monologue about the poem.

I may read an additional extended-metaphor example from a literary mentor text, or I may just save that for another day's lesson.

Extended Metaphor:

The Visit, by Richard Koch
Here they come, those starlings,
flapping into the bird-feeding station
like a motorcycle gang
descending on Joe's Diner,
scattering other customers
like mud under their tires,

each unkempt comb
like the upturned collar
on a black leather jacket.
With all the ease
of strong, sharp beaks
and Harleys waiting out front,
they strut straight for the suet
and pull up a stool.

"We're here. What's it to ya?
Let's eat."

So, after each of us has tried to come up with perhaps five metaphors from working with the guide sheet, we each place a check mark next to the favorite of our own metaphors that we have come up with in the

last few minutes, and then I ask the students to consider where that metaphor might be placed in the piece they are writing—and to mark that spot.

If I have taught a bit on the extended metaphor, as a final step I suggest that each writer then try to extend their metaphor by adding one or two or three sentences about it—explain how that metaphor works, why they see the comparison the way they do, or what would happen next if they saw this metaphorical connection that they have labeled. If the person were a tornado, what would they do that would be tornado-like? If arriving at this place was like arriving at the winter season, how was the place cold, freezing, dark, or unforgiving?

Finally, I predict for the student writers one of the more artistic steps they might try with a metaphor, one that is common among serious professional writers: That is the step of presenting a metaphor early in a piece of writing—in the first chapter of a book or on the first page of an essay—and then returning to that metaphor near the end of the piece and extending that metaphor one more step, ideally showing how the metaphorical connection can fit and dramatize the essence of the story or piece both as it begins and as it closes. A wilted flower may later be brought back to life by watering and sunlight. A surprise present may be just the wrong thing at the start—but later, with changes in people's lives, that gift may turn out to be just the right thing. A destructive tornado at the start may later vanish into a calm, sunny day. This surprisingly simple device—extending the metaphor one more step at the end—is felt by the reader to be helpful in both experiencing the feelings of the action of the piece and in experiencing artistic beauty in reading the piece.

Sharing Out in a Safe Environment

The preliminary share-out for this session is usually a quick trip around the room, wherein each writer is invited to read both their favorite metaphor they have created from our work session and also the sentence or two or three through which they extended that metaphor a bit, if they were able to do so. I also, as usual, allow individuals to "pass" instead of reading their metaphor, if they feel a need to do so.

This share-around of everyone's metaphor and brief extension of it is usually great fun, and there are invariably several that get shared that are especially effective. I do not make quality distinctions among the ones that are read; I express gratitude for the brave experimenting that each and all of them represent. So, my response to each one is, "Good work. Thank you!" Nevertheless, because there are some read that are already

strong metaphors, I say at the end, "See how close we are getting to good metaphors already?"

In subsequent class sessions, and in follow-up metaphor craft lessons, the students or I will share great metaphors we come across in our reading of books and in our own writing work. And people who need or want a metaphor for their piece will be invited to share their piece so we can provide some group brainstorming of possible metaphors.

After the "packed lesson" on metaphors, as subsequent class writings are read, we find metaphors creeping into our writing, and we find them making a difference in the power of the writing and in the engagement of readers with the emotions and purpose of a piece.

When I returned one week later to the second-grade classroom where I had taught metaphors—referred to at the start of this chapter—I found that the teacher had continued to help the class brainstorm about metaphors to the point where the walls were filled with example metaphors the students had found or generated.

Discourse Review: Restorative Conversations

As with each craft lesson chapter, this lesson, too, has included the three levels of brain understanding (what, how, why) in "What I Say." It is especially important to include "why": Why is the craft step we are considering important? What does it add to a piece of writing to help the writing achieve its purpose with an audience? If a craft step is not going to help the student writing in an important way, we should not be asking them to try it.

I have also emphasized at what points I see openings to make the lesson dialogic, rather than simply a teacher talk. And I have incorporated into the lesson a fairly rigorous academic expectation—that they will, indeed, try right then to come up with a metaphor for their paper. However, with students who have experienced trauma, we always want to build in powerful scaffolding to help the learners succeed with the task. I am providing extra scaffolding—to make the "Have a Go" (or "doing") more accessible—through the step of the "Metaphor Guide Sheet."

The "Sharing Out" is done in a spirit of fun, informally, with permission to "pass" if the student so desires. And the teacher response is nonjudgmental and supportive.

Common Missteps: Supportive Coaching Moves

There are two common errors students make in their early attempts to try for metaphors in their writing. Neither should be judged. Both should be

gently and kindly tolerated and supported. And both can be countered subtly by the mentor-text examples the teacher continues to provide over time.

The first error, made by all of us at times but made most particularly by younger writers, is simply to produce comparisons that are not really metaphors. The student writer might say something like "the snowball rolled along like a ball" or that "a wolf is fierce like a bear." Neither of these is precisely a metaphor. However, the teacher can say—and model and insist for the peers to say—"Thank you for sharing that," or, "That is very interesting," or, "You guys are coming up with all kinds of interesting comparisons!" And add, "It is so good that you are trying hard to come up with metaphors, because as you keep trying—and as we keep sharing with each other—we are going to get better and better at this!"

You will find that if you tolerate these not-quite-metaphors, two things will happen: The students will keep on trying with a good spirit because they feel safe that they will not be judged and humiliated in front of their peers, and the metaphors will indeed get better as students learn from abundant powerful metaphors in additional mentor texts including in each other's writing.

The second type of error students often make with metaphors is to choose a flamboyant but not emotionally poignant metaphor: "When I licked the ice cream, it was like a bolt of lightning hit me," or, "When my mother died that day, it was like someone threw up at my birthday party." In the first case, the lick of ice cream was probably not as large and potentially life-changing as a bolt of lightning. In the second case, someone throwing up at a party is gross and disappointing and a little upsetting. However, your mother dying is probably among the saddest moments of your life—more like "When my mother died, it was like the sky went dark," or, "When my mother died, I felt like I lost my whole path in life."

Here is the craft lesson point: A metaphor is best when it fits emotionally (and proportionally) the experience it is being compared to. Ice cream is a small experience; lightning bolts are big. Death is a large experience; someone throwing up at a party is very small by comparison. You can teach this issue at a later time—as a separate mini lesson on how we can continue to grow our work on metaphors.

However, here, at this early moment, the appropriate teacher and peer response is kind tolerance. Both of the hypothetical metaphor attempts I have just presented (ice cream, mother) can be left to stand without any harm coming to anyone in the world. Part of the emotion *is* captured in

each case. It is just that the metaphors are not as artistically potent as they might be. Of course, in conference, we may be able to gently coach the student toward a more effective metaphor. But if we let this moment pass, no worry. By our accepting these types of metaphor attempts with grace and patience—as we offer wonderful mentor-text examples—we keep our students positively engaged so they can naturally grow into ever more artistic uses of metaphor.

James's Story

I had just finished teaching the packed lesson on metaphors. However, I had only taught this group of students in one previous session in which we had generated our life-map topics. Also, this teaching was at an alternative school, comprised of a cross-age group of students who had, in essence, been kicked out of regular schools in the community because they had behavior problems.

The ages of the students ran from sixth through eleventh grade. James was considered a seventh grader. I knew before I began the lesson on this day that James would be one of the students I would need to focus on. He had sketched out pictures of possible topics on his life map in the previous session, but when I asked the students to freewrite, James had announced, "I'm not writin'." And he did not write.

On this day of the metaphor lesson as students filed into the writing room where I was waiting, the first words spoken were from James, who, even before he was seated, announced, "I'm not writin'." I said, "Well, we'll worry about that later."

He replied, "I'm not writin'."

I taught the lesson, shared the scaffolding of the "Metaphor Guide Sheet," and listened to the student metaphors. James sat silently and engaged in none of the writing. Then it came time for each student to work on their own for a bit. Their options were to find the place in their paper where they might insert their metaphor and then try to extend the metaphor by a sentence or two, or else they could simply freewrite (think out loud on paper some more ideas about their topic).

When I gave the instruction to work on their own for a bit, James reiterated, "I'm not writin'." When I saw most students were working, I walked over to James and knelt on one knee beside his desk, placing myself lower than he was. I said to him, "I see you have a life map there. Let's take a look at it." He allowed me to look over the pictures/sketches. "Which of these is your favorite topic?" I ventured.

"I like that one about my father taking me fishing," he said.

"Wow! That would be a great topic!" I replied. "I'm going to write that as a title at the top of this page: 'My Father and Fishing.' And then I'm going to write this one line: 'My father took me fishing.' " And I wrote these two steps as I said them to him. "Okay so far?" I asked. He nodded.

"What did your father do for you when he took you fishing?" I asked.

"He helped me bait the hook," James responded.

"Okay. That could be something you tell your reader," I said. "I'm going to write that next." And I did. "What was your favorite part?" I asked.

"Well, I caught a fish."

"That's great!" I said. "That's an important part of your story." I wrote for him, "I caught a fish!" Then I continued, "You know, I bet you could write more about that part, couldn't you?" His expression seemed calm and interested, so I handed him the pen. James then began to write, and as it happened, he continued writing during the several minutes that remained of writing time.

Reflection on James:

This moment did not turn James into an ongoing fluid writer, but it was a small, important victory. What I learned was actually a confirmation of what I felt I already knew: James was afraid. He was not used to succeeding in school, not used to having his work approved of or supported by his teachers. There were probably additional life-event reasons for his insecurity and apprehensions.

But one of the things we know about stress and trauma is that whatever the cause of the trauma, the healing is similar in each case. Healing can come from acceptance and love, and from providing an emotionally safe environment to work in.

James was offering a form of "fight" in his early response, "I'm not writin'." Of course, veteran teachers know that belligerence doesn't always release in the way it did with James. However, my point is that often, resistance *can* release and go in a positive direction—as it did in the previous chapter with Rosa's story and as it did in this alternative school with James's story.

We take the active step of trying to help through patience, support, and love. And if that does not work, we brainstorm with our teaching colleagues additional supports and loving gestures we might provide. And always two parts of the solution are to make the learning work meaningful to the student and to offer positive scaffolding for how the student can take a next step.

CHAPTER 7

Craft Lesson #4: Three Kinds of Beginnings

In school, sometimes it is the heartfelt trust of a teacher in the worth of a student in a completely local situation that produces a faith within the student that he or she is connected to the world in a way that matters, and that the world is worth caring about.

—Peggy McIntosh

Three Possible Beginnings to the Calico Cat Essay

1. Sensory Detail

Scratch, scratch, scratch. Her outstretched front paws make their morning scraping against the back door. "Meow, meow," I hear as I open the door. Then patter, patter, patter go her feet as she hurries around the deck, excited to see me, not sure which way she wants to lead. Then she decides—to her food dish in the garage.

2. Background

The calico cat didn't seem to have a home, but she seemed pretty tough because, even though she was skinny and had nowhere to go and was in no hurry to get there, she hung in there, even through that first cold winter. I guess she found ways to take care of herself. I'd say she seemed self-sufficient but lonely.

3. Begin at the Beginning

She just seemed to appear in our little world, that calico cat. At first, she would wander across the yard to where I left a little food on the ground for stray creatures. I would see her come and go, wondering if she had anywhere to live. I could tell she could use some loving care because she was so skinny.

Introduction: The Importance of Beginnings

Few aspects of writing craft are more important than how you begin. This opening moment may be the whole reason why a reader connects and commits to reading the piece. Conversely, this moment may not grip the reader sufficiently to encourage them to read further.

Certainly, not all craft steps in writing are of equal value. There are minor craft moves—some of which are only little flourishes of vocabulary or sentence structure—that can add to the art of a piece but that are not really key issues. All of the craft steps worked on in this book, however, are key issues of writing. That is why it is possible to start each chapter on each new craft step by claiming the great importance of this new step.

Many of the wonderful teacher-help books available offer their own approaches to how to begin—often referred to as "working with leads." I

particularly appreciate Nancie Atwell's work on this, both in her classic text, *In the Middle*, and in her more recent but equally wonderful book, *Lessons That Change Writers*.

As I read professional writers' texts, though, I feel I can see three foundational ways to begin. So, in this lesson, I have tried to offer students—and you, as teachers—what I consider the three classic, or basic, types of beginnings. We can, and should, move on from here to observe many other ways writers choose to start a piece. I wonder if it is possible actually to use as your lead to your piece of writing any of the other craft steps talked about in this book. I think so.

What I Say to Students: What, How, Why

I begin by explaining to students the basic point I just made above. First, I explain that the lead, or beginning, may well be the step that connects a reader and gets them engaged with your piece, or if we aren't careful, it could be the moment that fails to reach out to a reader well enough to keep them reading. So, the lead, or beginning, is a reference to that moment (or first words) with which we open our piece and through which we make first contact with a reader. As to how to work on your beginning? I recommend not trying to write your beginning early in your work on a piece of writing. It may not be wrong exactly to do that, but what I and many other writers find is that if you try to write your beginning first, you will often need to abandon that attempt later, after you have worked on your piece for a while and it has taken on a fuller shape and purpose. Once you have quite a bit of material toward your writing goal for that piece, it may be productive to pause and experiment with several different types of beginnings. Or it can even be an especially effective approach to try to write your beginning as the last step in writing—just before you turn to checking for correctness.

Once I have clarified why beginnings are important, and after advising to wait until late in working on the piece to write it, I propose that we work on modeling ourselves after mentor texts to get ideas for our beginnings—our usual strategy. I suggest that as we look at the writings of professional writers, we can see at least three types of basic—and powerful—beginnings that writers use to get themselves started with the topic and also to get the readers connected to the topic. These three types of beginnings are: 1) sensory detail, 2) background (or history), and 3) begin at the beginning.

It is probably true to say that most books or stories open with one of these types of beginnings. It is also very often the case, actually, that a book or story will begin with two or all three of these types of beginnings—put-

ting them as a series of beginnings, back-to-back-to-back. I will return to this point in a bit.

Mentor Text Examples: Dialogic Presenting

Sensory Detail Beginning

Sensory detail, as we know, is one of the most powerful ways a writer can reach out artistically to grip the reader and draw the reader into caring about what is being written. Through relevant sensory detail the reader experiences the moment with the writer. So it is no wonder that many writers choose to open with sensory detail. And no wonder one of the foremost writers for children and adolescents, Katherine Paterson, chooses to do so in her most famous book, *Bridge to Terabithia*.

Bridge to Terabithia, by Katherine Paterson

"Ba-room, ba-room, ba-room, baripity, baripity, baripity, baripity—Good. His dad had the pickup going. He could get up now. Jess slid out of bed and into his overalls."

The sound of the pickup engine cranking to a start is a great detail for Paterson to open with, because Jess was probably asleep—and it is sound that often wakes us up from sleep, whether it is the alarm clock next to our bed, pans clanking downstairs as someone fixes breakfast, or a clap of thunder in the woods nearby. It is also helpful that Paterson now moves to the combination of both a sense of kinesthetic movement and also a sense of touch with her use of the word "slid"—the kinesthetic movement of sliding out of bed and tactile sense of sliding on your (jeans-fabric) overalls.

With the sound, the sense of kinesthetic motion, and the sense of touch, Paterson actually, in a way, achieves three types of senses in this passage. Further, Paterson makes us very curious to read onward because we humans are most of all dependent on our eyes—so, because we have not yet seen anything in this story, we develop a growing curiosity. Once Jess has heard the pickup and slid into his jeans, what will he see?

So, Paterson has reached out and connected us to her story through three sensory strokes in her first three sentences, but she has also made us feel like we are about to greet the morning with our eyes, and we wonder not only what Jess will see when he looks at the pickup and at his day, but also what Jess and his dad will do this day, now that the pickup is ready to take them to some new adventure.

All of this is to say, in the end, that sensory detail can be, and usually is, a powerful way to begin your piece of writing.

Beginning with Background

Another common and helpful way to begin, however, is with background information. Even with book-length texts we want readers to understand the world and situation they are stepping into as they begin reading. We also want readers to know with whom they are about to travel on the journey of the book. Often, the writer wants readers to know these things right away, so a book will begin with background information.

However, especially with shorter writings like the memoirs, essays, or arguments we are often writing in school, it is helpful if we realize that a weakness of this form of writing—the short essay—can be a lack of history, a lack of context. This can leave us with a lack of knowledge of the situation, a lack of knowing who the characters are as people, and in general, a lack of knowing what happened before that makes this story and the characters what and who they are, which gives them the direction they have as the story or essay begins.

"Background" is another word for "history." And a problem with a short essay can be a lack of history that might allow the reader to understand why things are happening as they are in the piece of writing.

Many possible mentor books and stories begin with background. I will refer to two picture books here. A fine book by Louise Erdrich, an author who also writes books for adults, begins with background on the main character. The book is called *Grandmother's Pigeon*, and it is both about an eccentric grandmother who leaves the family in order to take a long trip and also about a nest with pigeon eggs in it that she leaves behind for the family. When the eggs hatch, the young birds turn out to be carrier pigeons, a type of bird that has been extinct for some time. Scientists then visit the house to see these pigeons that were not supposed to exist any longer. And a serious question of the book becomes what to do with the pigeons.

Beginning with Background: Person

Grandmother's Pigeon, by Louise Erdrich

"As it turned out, Grandmother was a far more mysterious woman than any of us knew. It was common knowledge that she had trained kicking mules. We'd often heard how she had skied the Continental Divide. I was with her myself once when she turned back a vicious dog by planting herself firm in its path and staring into its eyes."

Erdrich wants us to become more accepting and believing of the mysteries Grandmother has left behind with the family, so she starts the book right off with background history on what a mysterious person Grandmother herself was.

Erdrich makes Grandmother seem particularly mysterious by placing side-by-side "facts" about her that seem farfetched and unconnected—skiing the Continental Divide would involve, probably, skiing uncharted mountainous terrain that runs down the mountain that is the geological dividing point of the country. And training kicking mules, though it is not quite so exotic as skiing the Continental Divide, also seems like a most unusual past activity. The speaker, or narrator, of this story tries to help us believe these other exploits by testifying as an eyewitness to a third activity, turning back a vicious dog just by staring it down.

Partly because the skiing story has been told "often," our narrator seems to believe that this, and all of these background events, actually happened. And if these events happened, then we readers wonder what other fantastic or mysterious things Grandma might have done. Of course, as I have let on above, we are about to find out—she has left the eggs of an extinct bird species with them, and not only that, but the eggs hatch into living baby birds.

Beginning with Background: Place

North Country Night, by Daniel San Souci

"Snow is falling and it's nighttime in the North Country. One by one the lights go off in the cedar-sided cabin that overlooks the deep blue lake. Now it is time for the forest to come alive with the creatures of the night."

In *North Country Night*, author Daniel San Souci provides us another common and helpful type of background. Because the words in the title ("North Country") tell us the story is going to be about a place, it seems natural and helpful that the story would begin with information about this place—how it is to be in this place.

We are told that we will begin to experience and learn about the various creatures that live in this North Country, creatures that now come out and about more freely, perhaps, because the people who live in this place have now gone to sleep. So, in just three simple sentences, we learn that this is such an isolated nature area that once the lights go off in just one cabin, the whole forest is dark. This means there will very likely be a lot of forest and many types of animals.

In addition to characterizing the place for us in just these few sentences, San Souci also mixes two types of beginnings, as I have indicated is possible. That is one of the important artistic realizations of working on leads, or beginnings: When you select one type of beginning as your basic approach, you need not just utilize that type of beginning only. In this case, San Souci is also using sensory detail. We can see the white snow falling. We can see

the lights go off in the cabin and get a sense that the lake, which still showed a bit of blue a moment ago, has now gone dark. So, San Souci both gives us the mood and situation of the setting while also allowing us to experience it ourselves through sensory detail—two beginnings at once.

Begin at the Beginning

The Wagon, by Johnston and Ransome

"One Carolina morning, I was born. Everything was beautiful that day, Mama said, especially my skin like smooth, dark wood. But like all my family, birth to grave, my skin made me a slave."

The third type of beginning might seem the most obvious, but it addresses an area that it is easy for a writer to forget to include: How did this all get started? What was the moment or circumstance or event that was the beginning point for the story being told or for the essay issue being written about?

In the literary example I provide here from a children's picture book called *The Wagon*, we have one of the most crystal clear examples of the "begin at the beginning" introduction. The book presents the story of a person growing up in slavery and then beginning life after escaping that enslavement.

Authors Johnston and Ransome, like Daniel San Souci, give us two types of beginnings. By starting with the person's birth, they are definitely beginning at the beginning. Also, by communicating the color and texture of the person's skin—"like smooth, dark wood"—Johnston and Ransome are able to bring in a connection through sensory detail.

While the birth of a person is an obvious and dramatic beginning point, it is possible to translate this example to other topics by taking a questioning approach in your thoughts as a writer:

- When did my mother first become aware of her serious heart problem?
- When did I first realize that I wanted to become a basketball star?
- When did my friendship with that person first take a negative turn?
- When did Helen realize that she could never go back to being the same person?

Any one of these questions, or similar ones, can get us as writers on to an issue or point that we probably need to make at some point in our piece of writing—answering questions like, "What was the very beginning?" or "When did I/we first notice this?"

Using Two Beginning Steps: Sensory Detail and Background

Harlem Summer, by Walter Dean Myers

"I like Harlem in the summer except when it gets too hot, which it had been for the last week and we hadn't even reached July yet. On my block, women sat in their windows and kids hung out on the fire escapes trying to catch whatever breeze got lost and wandered up to Harlem. Old Man Mills and Jimmy Key were sitting on the stoop playing checkers. Jimmy had been wounded in the war and walked with a cane that he held across his lap as he studied the board. Everybody, except maybe Jimmy, knew that Mr. Mills was going to win.

" 'Man, it is some kind of hot out here,' Mr. Mills said, as he jumped two of Jimmy's men."

Walter Dean Myers wishes, I think, to mainly give background on the place and situation of Harlem in the summer and, of course, to share about how hot it is and how the heat slows everything down. However, he also wishes to draw us into this place and situation with sensory detail. So, as he gives background or overview information, he laces it with sensory images—the women sitting in the windows and the kids hanging out on the fire escapes. He adds both a visual and sense of touch with Mr. Key's cane across his knees, and he launches into fuller action in this opening when Mr. Mills speaks and brings sound into the moment: "Man, it is some kind of hot out here."

Managing Mentor Text Beginnings Dialogically

So far, I have just been explaining to you as teacher how you might present and explain the above mentor-text examples to students to represent the three types of beginnings. I would make the lesson dialogic at several points and in these three ways. First, I would introduce the mentor text portion of the lesson by saying, "I am going to show you mentor-text examples from professional writers, as I usually do. Let's just say these *are* good beginnings because such good writers are using them. I will read each beginning and let you tell me what you think might be good about that beginning first. Then I will explain what type of beginning I think it is. Your responses as readers and my explanations as a teacher will go together to tell us what's good about each beginning."

Second, after I present and explain each type of beginning, along with its mentor-text example, I will ask the students to think together about a commonly shared topic: a recent event at school, a problem in the community, a fun adventure that either has come to town or that people in the town have experienced. We will then brainstorm together how to use the

type of beginning I just clarified as a way to begin our (imaginary) group writing on this topic. So, the students will have had an opportunity to work out loud a bit with each type of beginning I present. Of course, this brainstorming can include pair-sharing at each step, which will tend to assist shy students into the classroom talk.

Third, after I have presented each of the three types and the mentor-text examples, I will hope to get about two students to volunteer to remind us as a class what they are writing about at this time. Then we as a class will try to brainstorm how to use two different beginnings of the three as a way to launch that piece. If you feel getting volunteers for this may create a roadblock, or too long of a pause, you can always get your volunteers in advance before the lesson begins. If need be, you can make a pitch about how much this helps the class to work on beginnings by practicing together with someone's topic.

Where the Calico Cat Comes In

Sensory Detail

To open the calico cat essay with sensory detail, it is possible that many different scenes of the cat could serve. A typical scene of what life with her was like, or even a key scene of a special moment with her, could help readers connect their feelings to the story.

However, to make this beginning more introductory to the cat story, I selected a typical scene of the early transition in our relationship, the period during which Mama was no longer just a stray but not yet quite a cat of the household.

To make more or less direct use of Katherine Paterson's example—in order to show student writers how they could model themselves after Paterson—I chose to start with first thing in the morning, just like *Bridge to Terabithia*, and I chose to emphasize details of sound, just like *Bridge to Terabithia*, so that readers hear the cat scratching—unseen—outside the door before they begin to get any other type of sensory detail:

Calico Cat—Sensory Detail Beginning

"Scratch, scratch, scratch. Her outstretched front paws make their morning scraping against the back door. 'Meow, meow,' I hear as I open the door. Then patter, patter, patter go her feet as she hurries around the deck, excited to see me, not sure which way she wants to lead. Then she decides—to her food dish in the garage."

Background

There are some artistic and intuitive questions involved in deciding what background or history to tell. Even in a book-length piece, a writer cannot tell all of the history they might wish to tell. It is necessary to select—and to select very carefully. There are two basic guiding issues that can help us make our intuitive guesses as to what to include.

First, what background information is intensely relevant to the issues and events of the story we are about to tell? Which pieces of information can provide meaningful context for the story we are about to tell or, for that matter, for the argument we are about to make? Of all of the information on the past we could share at this point, what would most let readers in on the issue or meaning of the piece of writing that we are getting under way?

Second, it is helpful to keep in mind that there are basically two types of background information. There is background information on the events or place, and there is background information on the characters or persons of the story or essay.

The literary text models I utilized in the early part of this lesson included background on the person when the book was mostly about the person (*Grandmother's Pigeon*) and included background on the place when the book was mostly about the place (*North Country Nights*).

In this case, our story is mostly about the characters, Mama and me. So, I provide background on her history or context immediately before the time when she and I first got acquainted**:**

Calico Cat—Begin with Background

"The calico cat didn't seem to have a home, but she seemed pretty tough, because even though she was skinny and had nowhere to go and was in no hurry to get there, she hung in there, even through that first cold winter. I guess she found ways to take care of herself. I'd say she seemed self-sufficient but lonely."

The fact that she was homeless was perhaps the most relevant piece of information I could provide, because this suggested that, if I was an animal lover, I might need to consider how she could have a home.

The fact that I saw her frequently but neither saw her associating with other cats nor saw her helped by any people in the neighborhood was information relevant to her condition. Together, these few pieces of information begin to supply a context for the thoughts and concerns I initially had and for the relationship that Mama and I developed during the story I am about to tell.

Begin at the Beginning

This type of lead asks a writer to consider the following two questions: At what point did the key issue in this story or essay begin? What launched or initiated the problem, the goal, or the new turning point?

Modeling after those questions, we could ask about the calico cat, When did I first realize that this cat was relevant to me, that this was a cat that I cared about? This involves giving a little background too. As I have been indicating, these beginnings are often intermingled or built upon one another. I try to get myself to reach back toward something like the moment I noticed the relationship beginning by using the phrase "at first."

Calico Cat—Begin at the Beginning

"She just seemed to appear in our little world, that calico cat. At first, she would wander across the yard to where I left a little food on the ground for stray creatures. I would see her come and go, wondering if she had anywhere to live. I could tell she could use come loving care because she was so skinny."

The Task: Have a Go—Students Doing

The student task, or the writers' opportunity to have a go, is quite simple. I teach this "Three Kinds of Beginnings" craft lesson after the writers have selected a topic they are willing to be engaged with, after they have done some freewriting, and after they have worked on a few scenes in sensory detail—scenes they think they will need in order to tell their story well or to be effectively informative or argumentative in their essay.

So, with a moderate amount of writing material in place to work from, there is a bit of foundation in place to help a writer ask, What scene of sensory detail might characterize the early phase of this? What background history do readers most need to get a grasp of the context and key issues of my piece? At what point would it be most appropriate to say this action or issue first began?

Then my simple suggestion to the student writers is this: "In a few minutes time—as many as ten minutes, perhaps—try out two of these three types of beginnings, whichever two of the three most appeal to you or seem somehow like the best fits for your piece." At the conclusion of this have a go session, I ask writers to place a check mark beside their favorite of their two tries, even if they are not "in love" with either one.

Scaffolding

Then I may create a quick brainstorming session for those writers who are having difficulty—they didn't like either one of their beginning experiments, or they couldn't figure out how to proceed.

Our brainstorming problem-solving will have two parts. First, a few writers who felt a sense of some success will read their favorite beginning experiment. We will try for examples of different types—maybe even one of each. Then the writer who is having difficulty will explain briefly about her or his piece of writing without reading extensively from their piece: what the basic topic is and what they think is their goal with the piece at this point.

Then the helpers—the rest of the class and I—will do a combination of two things:

1) We will gently inquire of the writer in each of three areas:
   a. what she or he thinks might be the very beginning;
   b. what early scene might be able to show how things were early on or before; and
   c. what few pieces of the background history she or he can think of.
2) Based on this gentle interrogation, the same helpers (or others) will make some guesses on the same points—guessing on a scene that might have occurred and/or that might work to get things started, guessing at some history that might be particularly relevant to what the writer declared to be her or his goal, and guessing at what might have been an early discovery by the writer or an early turning point that, in a way, launched the story or problem.

The writer makes notes to help herself or himself both during this back-and-forth conversation and also immediately afterward.

It is not necessary, right at this time, that we arrive at potent solutions for each writer's work on beginnings. I emphasize this is a practice session—and we have just begun to work on this issue. Further help can be provided in teacher or peer one-on-one conferences and from the writer's writing circle group.

Sharing Out in a Supportive Environment

Some sharing out has occurred during the brainstorming session described above. However, it feels natural, based on that brainstorming, to do additional sharing out. One easy format involves simply going around the room and having each individual share their favorite of their two attempts

at beginnings. Another easy alternative is to have people share both of their experimental attempts at beginnings in pairs or in groups of three.

In pairs or threesomes, or in a note each person writes to themselves at the end of this work session, I usually ask the writers to "think out loud on paper" by making notes of a plan that might utilize both of their experiments in their piece of writing. It is, of course, possible to start with sensory detail and then follow with background, or to begin at the beginning and then offer background or a sensory moment, or almost any combination of the three starts. Sometimes, skillful professional writers may even save the relevant background until toward the end of the piece, when adding that context provides a new level of meaning to the story or essay.

Discourse Review: Restorative Conversations

In my experience delivering this lesson to students, I have often had the have a go period go quite smoothly; most seem to just get to work and jot down some possible beginnings, and a few raise their hands for me to help, for whom I happily offer my think-aloud brainstorming, in a short conference, of how I might begin their piece. I think teachers are often too fearful about offering specific help. When a child is first learning to cross the street, we do not give them instructions and wish them good luck! We take them by the hand and look both ways, then watch them look both ways, and then walk them across, never letting go of their hand. This is how a first practice step should feel. There is plenty of time in their life for the students to do this work on their own. Also, if many students seem stumped at the start of the have a go session, the teacher can simply move the group brainstorming for individuals who are struggling up to this start moment—keeping the work in the whole group, offering that group brainstorming as scaffolding up front.

In my discourse approach, I make clear that, as is usual with the have a go period, the stakes are not actually high. I make the point that while some scenes may be more helpful than others and some background history may be more helpful than others, this is an exploratory session—and virtually any choice the writer makes intuitively based on their writing so far will probably help the reader and serve the purpose. Further, the writer can share their attempt later with their writing circle to get help.

Common Missteps: Supportive Coaching Moves

I'm not sure I think of the wandering attempts students may engage in at this point to be missteps. When you practice shooting the basketball, you do not make a basket every time. But you are practicing the step and,

with helpful coaching, will hone your skill. As with craft steps presented in earlier chapters, we want to be accepting of approximations. You can accept a student step as helpful practice without declaring it to be wonderful writing right at that time. So, what we might perceive as an early error students could produce—presenting background history that is not as relevant as possible, for example—can be accepted as workable for the moment and as a practice shot in basketball. However, we can also offer the questioning part of our PQS response protocol as a way student writers can obtain guideposts for what additionally to include for their readers. Someone might ask the writer, "When did you first meet that person?" or, "How did your mother get in the hospital?" With these questions, they are often helping the writer to see a beginning, or early material, they perhaps ought to include in their paper.

Finally, I remind writers of that point made above: Though you may select one of your beginning experiments as your actual beginning, you may very well improve your paper by using both experiments near the beginning.

*TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING TIP #2—WAYS TO CALM DOWN

WHAT

There are quite a few methods recommended in trauma-informed research that students can use to help themselves calm down when stressed, anxious, or upset. These steps can be implemented while the student is sitting in the "Quiet Space" discussed after chapter 5. Or these steps can be taken by the student while seated in the classroom or while standing next to their chair. Also, these methods can be used by a student individually as needed, or they can be incorporated into the day by the teacher to use with the whole group at certain points to help the class clear their heads or put difficult feelings to rest before continuing the work.

WHY

As stated above, these calming-down steps and clearing-your-head steps are valuable as practical tactics to help highly stressed or emotionally upset students. However, they are also (and especially) valuable as focused moments in your classroom when the entire class can engage in one of the calming activities to help them relax and release from a previous activity and to somewhat restore themselves so as to be ready for the next learning.

HOW

Here are a few calm-down methods:

1. Take deep breaths: Breathe slowly and deeply in, and then exhale slowly and fully out (about five seconds each). Even just three to five deep breaths can help a class or student get refreshed and ready to move on to a next step.
2. Close your eyes: Just pause and close your eyes. Closing your eyes removes a great deal of the sensory stimuli around you and allows you to think more clearly or to focus on calming down. Also, you are releasing yourself consciously from whatever task or experience was before you simply by closing your eyes—you are giving yourself a break.

3. Use headphones: Keep noise-canceling headphones handy to provide to students as needed. The teacher can suggest using the headphones, or the student can request them. As with closing your eyes, this step removes what may be distracting stimuli in the room, helping the student to calm down and possibly to better focus on the work. The headphones can offer nature sounds or peaceful white noise, too, if set up to do so.
4. Hug yourself or stretch: It is possible to give yourself a nice hug. You wrap your own arms around you, snug to your sides, and squeeze your hands gently against your back (not too tight!). A hug from a friend can be helpful and reassuring, but a hug from yourself can help too! Pausing to stretch your arms and maybe your legs far out can help also. Stretch way up in the air and then way out to the side. Rise up on tip-toe and stretch your legs too. Of course, you need a little room to be able to do this.
5. Press against the wall: It helps some students to be able to get up and just push firmly against the wall for a few moments. It allows movement—getting up—and brings physical stress relief.

CHAPTER 8

Craft Lesson #5: Three Possible Endings

Love reveals what only love can see.

—R. D. Laing

Three Possible Endings to the Calico Cat Essay

1) Everything Is the Same, Except One Thing Is Different

So, I go out to that same deck every morning and usually at about the same time. And of course, every day there's that same calico cat—that "stray" calico cat—doing her pacing around and greeting behavior, like she's all glad to see me. Only now she knows for sure, and I know when I first glimpse her, the light flip-flop of joy that comes to my heart.

2) What I Learned …

I guess I've learned, again, that life is not convenient, but it's worth it. In fact, of course, the truth is that just when it is very darn inconvenient is sometimes exactly when life is most worth it. I know I can't always do everything I might like to about some of the world's bigger problems, and that often makes me feel frustrated and sad. However, one thing I can do is try to make as sure as I can in this uncertain and screwy world that one slightly scrawny calico cat has enough to eat—and a little love too.

3) A Decision That Takes Things in a New Direction

Jimmy—obnoxious Jimmy, that is—was trying to see if he wanted to take the calico cat home with him when suddenly, I realized (and my mind went a little worried on me) that Jimmy might not be just right for this cat. In a little while, I found myself glad when he rubbed his beard and said, "Nope, I guess it wouldn't be fair to her or to me to take her home when I'm not sure I want her."

That's okay, I thought, *because you've shown me that you don't see—she's got nothing but sweet bones in her body and sweet intentions toward the world.* I don't know when she went from being that dumb stray cat to being a valuable jewel of the cat world, but I guess we humans don't entirely control such things. Oh well.

Introduction: The Importance of Endings (What I Say to Students: How, What, Why)

As I have said, each of the craft lessons in this book is from a group of key—maybe even essential—craft lessons. With that in mind, it is possible

to say, sincerely, that few steps the writer makes artistically are any more important than how she or he decides to end the piece. Because beginnings and endings can be quickly clarified as dramatically important to a piece, my remarks on them—including these remarks on endings—can be succinct. Nevertheless, we want to be sure to touch the three intellectual spaces in the brain that especially help those who have experienced trauma to make a connection to the lesson: what, how, why. As I often do, I begin with *why*. I say, "What the reader takes away from the piece of writing, in terms of meanings for life and also in terms of emotional impact, will be greatly influenced by the way the writer ends the piece. The very ending moment is our last chance to make the meaning of our piece clear and our last chance to make the impact on the reader that we hope to make. If we want the reader to understand something important to us, or to feel the love or sadness we felt, or to understand what some experience truly taught us, then the ending is our last chance to achieve this.

Then I move to *what*. Both in this *what* explanation and then in the mentor-text examples, I am also addressing the *how*. There are numerous good ways to end, but the three I teach here are core types of endings, three of the most basic types, three tried-and-true ways to end that are often used by professional writers. I share what the first type of ending looks and feels like by calling it the "Hollywood ending" (I call it this because it is the ending of a sequence used in many films) and providing a hypothetical example. Then I show what all three types look like with mentor-text examples.

Hollywood Ending: Everything Is the Same, Except One Thing Is Different

I tell student writers, "End with the same setting and almost the same situation from early in your story, only one thing or a couple of things that are important are different."

An easy way to clarify this possibility is to discuss one of the more stereotypical movie plots. This standard plot, for example, might be about a young woman who moves to the big city in search of her dreams. She plants seeds in an old flower box outside the window of her rundown apartment. When she meets the possible romantic interest of her dreams or experiences other early success, a camera shot shows little green shoots growing out of the dirt in the box. Perhaps later, at a moment of romantic crisis or conflict in her work goals, the now longer green shoots look a little dried out or slightly browned and tilting. But when the romantic relationship is fulfilled in a long-term commitment and her professional aspiration is coming to fruition at the end of the film, there is a final camera shot of flowers blooming in the now freshly painted flower box.

Each time as I tell this corny movie story to the student writers, I am aware that I am making this type of ending seem corny too. And that is what I say next. I acknowledge that I am making this kind of ending seem shallow, but I say that is not necessarily the case. In fact, it can be one of the most effective endings, and to reinforce that point, I tell the writing story of a seventh-grade student I worked with named Rodney.

Rodney's Story:

Rodney happened to be writing a narrative about his grandmother who had recently passed away. Rodney lived in a city, and during his earlier childhood, one of the things his grandmother contributed to his life was that she was most often the adult who took him and his siblings to the beach. So, there is a scene in his narrative of a typical experience of his family at the beach. After this lesson on endings, Rodney wrote a conclusion in which everything was the same, except one thing was different: In this case, Rodney was once again at the beach, only now his grandmother was not there with him. His readers found this a very meaningful type of ending, and it carried the emotional impact of showing a narrative moment in which he felt the absence of his loving grandmother.

Mentor Text Examples: Dialogic Teaching
Everything Is the Same, Except One Thing Is Different

One of my favorite children's books that uses this type of ending is a book that is now little known but that deserves to be better known. The book is Katherine Paterson's *Flip-Flop Girl*. The title gets its name from the fact that a key friend to our main character, who is an upper elementary student named Vinnie, is a girl who cannot afford shoes, so she is always wearing flip-flops.

In the story, Vinnie is the big sister to her little brother, Mason. Early in the book, we learn that their father recently became very ill and then died. Shortly after the father's death, Mason stops talking. So, for most of the book, Mason never talks.

Near the end of the book, Mason does start to talk again. At the very end we have a scene of Vinnie and Mason, who share a bedroom in the small house they live in with their mother and grandmother. In that scene, they are once again in their bedroom together, preparing to go to sleep. Only one thing is different—Mason is talking:

Flip- Flop Girl, by Katherine Paterson

> Now that he was talking, Mason and Vinnie sometimes talked in bed after the lights were out and they were supposed to be going to sleep. She told him about Daddy. He remembered about Daddy making funny faces at him, but he couldn't remember half the things about Daddy that Vinnie could. She wanted him to know what a great daddy they'd had. Besides, if she kept telling him, it would keep her from forgetting.

One of the endearing things Vinnie remembers about their father was his clumsy knock-knock jokes. The book's very ending involves her telling one to Mason:

> "Knock knock," she said.
> "What?"
> "You're supposed to say 'Who's there?'"
> "Why?"
> "Because that's how you do knock-knock jokes, Mason."
> "Okay. Who's there?"
> "Mason."
> "Mason? I'm Mason."
> "I know, Stupid. But you're supposed to say 'Mason who?'"
> "Why?"
> "So we can do the joke."
> "Oh, okay. Mason who?"
> "May sun shine on you."
> He laughed like crazy in the dark. The room was quiet for a moment, then a small voice came from the other bed. "Vinnie?"
> "Yeah?"
> "I don't get it."
> "I'll explain it to you," Vinnie said, and she did.

This knock-knock joke in the dark shows Mason coming back to life as a communicator (with Vinnie's help) and the rebirth in their relationship as loving siblings.

What I Learned …

Another potentially powerful ending is one I call the "what I learned" ending. I have not statistically analyzed the frequency of this ending in literature, but my recollections of my reading suggest that this is one of the most common and useful endings.

It is impressive to me how often a writer will write at or near the end of an essay or story a what-I-learned section that draws out explicitly what the writer or character has learned about life from going through the experience of the story or from studying the material of the essay.

Simply put, this ending consists of attempting to end straightforwardly with the "lesson": End with an explanation of what you've learned, and how you will try to carry that lesson with you as you go through life.

Of the many texts that end with some version of this what-I-learned step, one of my personal favorites is the great novel by Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*. We find David, at the end of the many difficult experiences in the book, standing on a mountainside speaking thoughtfully to himself (what would be a soliloquy in a drama), explaining that he is stronger as a person for all he has gone through—"like tempered steel" that is all the stronger for having been subjected to high heat.

Another of my favorites, and one I traditionally share with young writers during this lesson, is the ending of the children's classic by William Armstrong called *Sounder* (emphasis added to quote through italics):

Sounder, by William Armstrong

> "I've dug a grave for him under the big jack oak tree in the stalk land by the fencerow. It'll be ready if the ground freezes. You can carry him on his coffee sack and bury him. He'll be gone before I come home again."
>
> And the boy was right. Two weeks before he came home for Christmas, Sounder crawled under the cabin and died. The boy's mother told him all there was to tell.
>
> "He just crawled up under the house and died," she said.
>
> The boy was glad. *He'd learned* to read his book with the torn cover better now. He had read in it: "Only the unwise think what has changed is dead." He had asked the teacher what it meant, and the teacher had said that if a flower blooms once, it goes on blooming somewhere forever. It blooms on for whoever has seen it blooming. *It was not quite clear to the boy then, but it was now.*
>
> Years later, walking the earth as a man, it would all sweep back over him, again and again, like an echo on the wind.
>
> The pine trees would look down forever on a lantern burning out of oil but not going out. A harvest moon would cast shadows forever of a man walking upright, his dog bouncing after him. And the quiet of the night would fill and echo again with the deep voice of Sounder, the great coon dog.

End with a Decision the Main Character Makes

This is perhaps a logical way for a narrative to end, with the main character making a clear, perhaps life-changing decision. Here, as with the

everything-is-the-same-except-one-thing-is-different ending, Hollywood movies can provide some of the examples. As with the one-thing-that's-different ending, the conventional romantic comedy can provide a model.

In the typical romance, the couple meets and falls in love. Then, as their relationship seems to be growing, a complication or problem occurs. One of the two at some level betrays the other, or a serious misunderstanding occurs. It is only near the end of the film that they right the ship of their relationship—the betrayer is sorry, makes amends, and is forgiven, or the misunderstanding is cleared up—and the couple makes a new and final decision to be married or to at least pursue their future together as a romantic couple.

Restating this plot makes the ending seem hackneyed, of course. And there is the potential for this to be hackneyed. However, most writing topics have been written about before: topics like "my favorite mentor," "my pet's death," "a struggle that led to success (or failure) …" All are common topics. However, that does not mean we should not write about those topics. The key is to write about a topic from your own unique experience and from your own individual understanding.

The same is true with many of the standard techniques, or craft steps. They are commonly utilized by good writers. However, the craft steps continue to work powerfully when employed for important and meaningful purposes by other writers. So, it is with these standard endings I have been suggesting that we teach about here. They are not to be avoided simply because they are commonly used. Rather, they are commonly used because they work powerfully.

As with the other types of conclusions, there are many examples of "a decision at the end" in children's literature. You could say Gary Paulson's *Hatchet* ends with the boy's decision that he must not set aside his lessons from living on his own in order to go back to his previous life in civilization, but rather he must always remember the lessons of the simplicity of human need and the importance of self-reliance as he also resumes his family and school life.

The example I choose to include most specifically in this particular lesson is from an Underground Railroad book from the "quilts" genre. *Under the Quilt of Night* by Deborah Hopkinson and James E. Ransome ends with a boy and his family having escaped from enslavement into freedom by their journey on the Underground Railroad. And the book ends with the boy realizing he has achieved freedom, but the heart of the ending is that he also makes a commitment (emphasis added to quote through italics):

Under the Quilt of Night, by Hopkinson and Ransome

> Over the trees the sun comes up.
> The dark pines glow like gold.
>
> Freedom!
> I take a deep breath
> and when I let go
> my voice flies up in a song.
> My own song
> of running in sunshine
> and dancing through fields.
> *I'll jump every fence in my way.*

The boy is sharing that he learned that he has achieved "Freedom!" The author is giving us a glimpse of sensory detail from his first "free" morning with his seeing that the "dark pines glow like gold," with the kinesthetic sense of his "deep breath," the sound of his "song," and the further kinesthetic sense of "dancing" and the possible need to "jump."

So, there is a sense in which this is both of the previous endings I have written about above: a learning (or realization) and a sensory detail experience that shows how everything is the same, except one very important thing is different.

And I am quite comfortable stating that this passage does indeed utilize both of those angles, or aspects, in its ending. However, I believe the primary ending, and the heart of this final passage, is the book's final words and the boy's new decision: "I'll jump every fence in my way."

Now that he has gained his freedom, and through such an ordeal of struggle, he is not going to let any future obstacle stand between him and his freedom. He is willing to continue to struggle and, if need to be, to leap every fence that might appear in his path.

Being with a main character as she or he makes such a big decision can be an exhilarating experience for the reader—whether the new decision is to make a lifetime love commitment, as in the Hollywood movies discussed, or a decision about what attitude and approach to carry into the future with you to help you face life's challenges, as in *Under the Quilt of Night*.

Using Two Ending Steps: Everything Is the Same, Except One Thing Is Different, and What I Learned

Esperanza Rising, by Pam Munoz Ryan

> Isabel sat next to Abuelita at the wooden table. They each held crochet hooks and a skein of yarn. "Now watch, Isabel, ten stitches to the top of the mountain."

> Abuelita demonstrated and Isabel carefully copied her movements.
>
> The needle rocked awkwardly and at the end of her beginning rows, Isabel held up her work to show Esperanza. "Mine is all crooked!"
>
> Esperanza smiled and reached over and gently pulled the yarn, unraveling the uneven stitches. Then she looked into Isabel's trusting eyes and said, "Do not ever be afraid to start over."

This is a classic scene of things being the same but with one profound difference. Esperanza had an almost charmed and happy childhood for a time where she was taught things, such as crocheting, in a warm environment. However, as we end this story, that was long ago, and since then, Esperanza has had her life overturned and has had to grow up in a migrant camp with her mother. In the absence of that idyllic early childhood, Esperanza is continuing these warm family traditions of teaching, communicated in the sensory-detail scene of crocheting together. In the early part of the book it was Esperanza's abuelita (grandmother) who taught Esperanza to crochet. Now, at the end, as abuelita teaches Isabel, the scene concludes with Esperanza sharing with Isabel what she too was taught about crocheting and what she *has learned*. Life may break apart and destroy your happy situation, but you need to bravely continue to fight for joy and love, and in doing so, it is important to know this: "Do not ever be afraid to start over."

Making the Mentor-Text Experience Dialogic

As with the session on beginnings, I have simply explained the three types and the three mentor-text examples straightforwardly above for your benefit as a teacher—providing the language commentary I truly use with students. However, when I present the endings lesson to students, I take the same dialogic approach I described with beginnings in the previous chapter. I suggest that since the endings examples I have chosen come to us from wonderful writers, let's choose to think that they *are* good. Then I read the ending once aloud (and also provide them a copy), after which I invite them to speak out on any part of the content, wording, or craft that might make the ending good.

Then I read the mentor-text example aloud again, along with my explanation of what "type" of ending it represents. Then I invite the students to coexplain with me as best we can *why* that type of ending might be a good choice: Why do we think the author may have chosen to end their story in exactly that way?

The teacher can "read" the group as this dialogic exchange proceeds. If the teacher's questions begin to seem like uncomfortable cross-exam-

ination, usually the pressure can be let off the situation by giving students the opportunity to turn and talk with a partner about the question on the table. If the students struggle a bit with these steps, that is more than okay. Struggle in a supportive environment is necessary to powerful learning. We want them to become comfortable with informal brainwork that they do along the way in each lesson.

Where the Calico Cat Comes In

In the case of working from these three endings, and according to the advice I have given above, I try to bring all three of these traditional endings to life anew by making use of them as possibilities with the calico cat essay that is both important to me and that I also know intimately and uniquely. I know this story as only the owner and close friend of the calico cat can know it.

1) Calico Cat--Everything Is the Same, Except One Thing Is Different

   So, I go out to that same deck every morning and usually at about the same time. And of course, every day there's that same calico cat—that "stray" calico cat, doing her pacing around and greeting behavior, like she's all glad to see me. Only now she knows for sure, and I know when I first glimpse her, the light flip-flop of joy that comes to my heart.

2) Calico Cat--What I Learned

   I guess I've learned, again, that life is not convenient, but it's worth it. In fact, of course, the truth is that just when it is very darn inconvenient is sometimes exactly when life is most worth it. I know I can't always do everything I might like to about some of the world's bigger problems, and that often makes me feel frustrated and sad. However, one thing I can do is try to make as sure as I can in this uncertain and screwy world that one slightly scrawny calico cat has enough to eat—and a little love too.

3) Calico Cat--A Decision That Takes Things in a New Direction

   Jimmy—obnoxious Jimmy, that is—was trying to see if he wanted to take the calico cat home with him, when suddenly, I realized (and my mind went a little worried on me) that Jimmy might not be just right for this cat. In a little while, I found myself glad when he rubbed his beard and said, "Nope, I guess it wouldn't be fair to her or me to take her home when I'm not sure I want her."
   That's okay, I thought, *because you've shown me you don't see—she's got nothing but sweet bones in her body and sweet intentions toward the world.*

> I don't know when she went from being that dumb stray cat to a valuable jewel of the cat world. I guess we humans don't entirely control such things. Oh well.

All three of the above endings could work, I think, in an effective way. However, I'd like to briefly clarify the significance of the last one, "making a decision." I had been trying to give the stray calico cat away for nearly the entire first year I had known her. I had put out email memos at my workplace and notified my circle of friends, even my brothers and sister, that I had a beautiful calico cat to give away, one with a particularly nice personality and disposition, a very people-friendly cat.

Then, in the fall, a little over one year since she had appeared in my world, my brother and a friend of his, Jimmy, visited my wife and me. By then, Mama, the calico cat, was actually hanging out inside our house—not "living" there yet, according to our personal definition of things. And it was a little bit over the period of that weekend visit, but especially in the few minutes characterized above, just before Jimmy and my brother left for their return trip back to another state, that I realized, once and for all, that, actually, I loved this calico cat. She had become a member of our family, and I did not want to give her away, not to Jimmy or to anyone else.

I never tried to give her away again. She lived a pampered life as our cat for over eighteen years after that.

Such a moment invariably feels like a "right" place to end for readers. Their curiosity about what will happen has been cleared up by this new decision. They are freed to envision the new decision played out over time in the main character's life, and they can settle and rest their mind and feelings about the characters and events of the story.

I have read in a screenplay-writing-advice book the stipulation to "end the film" as soon as possible after such a decision, because that decision brings together and releases all the energy that has been building in the movie plot up until then.

Scaffolding

It can serve to continue the dialogic intent of the lesson—as well as providing whole group scaffolding—if we once again solicit two volunteers who will briefly explain the topic and purpose of the piece of writing they are working on and then will allow the group to brainstorm how to make use of two of the three different types of endings to conclude their piece (with no obligation for the writer to utilize what the group brainstorms, of course).

The Student Task: Have a Go—Students Doing

The student task for this lesson is similar to the task in the previous crafting-a-beginning lesson—and similar to the scaffolding brainstorming above. The have a go step involves trying out two of the three different types of endings. This may be about a ten- or fifteen-minute activity. Having attempted two, the writer places a check mark beside the one they like best.

It is relatively easy, if you have a workshop environment established in your classroom, to place a writer struggling with this task with one or two other writers who are experiencing success. All three writers can share out whatever they have in the form of attempts at endings, and their small peer group can weigh in on which one(s) they like best as possible endings for the piece. Two writers can pause and brainstorm with the one struggling—as the whole group demonstrated above. The peers can also consider whether both endings might be utilized, one as a pre-ending, and one as the actual ending.

Mozart was known, in his musical composition, to playfully present what seemed like an ending a few times before the actual ending of a piece. It can easily be even more artistic, and more complete in meaning, for a writer to utilize two of the ending types.

Sharing Out in a Supportive Environment

As is usual with these experiments in progress (such as the have a go part of these craft lessons), when writers share out—in this case, sharing their new possible conclusions—it serves as both a celebration and a further brainstorming session. Those who had difficulty applying the current craft lesson get to hear numerous peer examples, which often serves to prime the pump of ideas for those who have been temporarily stumped.

I stress in this type of sharing out that we are always ready to share our successes and celebrate together, but that the actual main reason to share at this point, while our paper is still very much in progress, is to get help from our peers—our whole-class writing community.

It would be possible to move to teamwork here by forming groups of four, two of whom were put into the group because they have new endings they feel reasonably positive about, and two of whom were put into the group because they still feel at a loss for their ending, even after the craft lesson and the have a go step. Each writer who feels a sense of success could share their new ending, and the group can experience these as further models of what is possible. Then each of the writers who is having

difficulty could describe their piece of writing, what they like best about the overall writing so far, and what they think or wonder about their possible endings. Then the other three members of their group could both ask questions about the piece and propose possible approaches to the ending.

Discourse Review: Restorative Conversations

When we are in a teaching-and-learning environment, we ought to engage in different degrees of scaffolding, depending on the needs of the learner and the needs of the situation. In the last chapter, I used the example of teaching a young child to cross the street. Similarly, in teaching a child to ride a bicycle, we actually hold on to the bike and trot along with the bike rider as much as possible, until we feel they have achieved their balance and are mainly in control. So, each of these have a go sessions in the writing classroom should not be treated like a big test, nor should it be treated as if it is important for the person to be on their own. As the gradual-release model for a lesson clarifies, being on your own is a late stage of learning to do something.

The whole idea of apprenticeship—which has a long and powerful history as a teaching-learning concept—is that the learner will work for an extended period under the tutelage and guidance of the expert craftsperson. During that time, the craftsperson will offer whatever advice and intervention is necessary for the work and learning to go well.

So, our model for the have a go moment in these craft lessons is the model we acquire from the highly guided and high-help context of an early apprenticeship situation. Later, student writers can be placed more on their own. However, most professional writers also have folks they get help from, sometimes all along the way.

Common Missteps: Supportive Coaching Moves

Avoiding a Problem with the "I Learned" Ending

I have had discussions with teacher friends about the "learning" ending, and some of the teachers share that they feel their students tend to select overly general and uninspiring statements for this, such as, "I learned that life is precious (or worth living)" and such. I do not have this problem with students in my work very much because I include the following coaching steps. First, the "I learned" statement should be about the most intensely important thing the writer learned. If I am working with very young, or quite inexperienced, writers, I will simply ask that writers add a "how they learned" that lesson from that experience. The model sentence for this can

be "When such and such a thing happened, I realized …" Just adding a sentence or two about how the experience they are writing about taught them this lesson can be a powerful help to this ending.

Or I may ask that they consider including a reference to one time since learning this lesson when they think they tried to apply the lesson in a life moment.

For writers ready to work out their ending more fully, the explanation can be: "To Student Writers: Try not to settle for just one abstract statement like 'Life is precious.' Add the *how* part of that lesson. And you also could add, 'Since I learned this lesson, one time I applied it to my life was in a situation when …"

If you are following along here, perhaps you recall that these ingredients are included in *Esperanza Rising* and in the "I learned" ending of *Sounder*. In *Esperanza Rising*, the author presents a scene moment in sensory detail just before the lesson statement—"Do not ever be afraid to start over." In *Sounder*, the author follows up the "I learned" statement with a beautifully reflective paragraph elaborating on the learning.

*TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING TIP #3—USE THE MENTOR TEXTS

Much of the world's great literature deals with tragedy, sorrow, loss, or heartbreak, as well as overcoming challenges and experiencing joy, love, and success. Much of what children and adolescents write about from their lives will have similar topics and themes. Such is also the case with the mentor text examples included in this book. A wise and healing teacher will utilize this understanding to engage students in conversations that can help them to learn from and heal from loss as experienced in the mentor texts and in the writings of their fellow students.

Partly, I include this advice at this moment because the "endings" presented by the mentor texts in the previous chapter invite such conversations. In *Flip-Flop Girl*, the children's father has died at the outset of the book, and also, Mason has become a child who does not speak. In *Esperanza Rising*, Esperanza's father was killed by bandits early in the book, and also, her life changed from her being wealthy to her being poor. In *Sounder*, the boy, who has now become a man, experiences his dog dying, which feels like the loss of a close friend. In *Under the Quilt of Night*, the main characters have experienced being enslaved and then the brave, difficult, and scary journey to freedom.

Skilled adult readers get many things from reading books, but one of the most important things they get is the gift of being able to think about their own life in light of the experiences and outcomes of the characters they are reading about.

The teacher can bring about learning and healing from mentor texts and from reading other students' writing if the teacher is willing to ask and then provide space for conversations about:

- Have you had experiences like this character in the mentor text?
- Do you feel you responded alike or different from this character?
- What outcomes occur from the character's response to their problem?
- What outcomes have you experienced from your own responses to a problem?
- What can we learn for our own lives from the loss or difficulty this character experienced?

- What can we learn from what they did in response to their problem and from the outcomes of their responses?
- Overall, what can we learn about helping and healing ourselves? And also, what can we learn about helping and healing others?

Of course, conversations about such important questions can lead to further writing in notebooks, or to new papers, or to revisions of previous papers.

CHAPTER 9

Craft Lesson #6: Vivid Verbs (Giving Energy to Action)

Vivid Verbs: The Calico Cat Essay

1) Verbs for Fast Action in a Dream

   After about a month, I had a dream. Mama came *galloping* toward me across a field—healthy and whole. Her gait *rolled* along easy and free, as if *striding* toward something, not *bolting* away from something. Her three colors of white, orange, and black *swirled* in movement like a Picasso painting of a cat. I seemed absent from this picture, but somehow I *sensed* I stood at the edge, waiting, where I *anticipated* Mama's arrival. In my dream, I could almost feel my heart *race*, and my dizzying, light-headed sense of elation.

2) Verbs for a Quiet Moment at Bedtime

   Now, when I go to bed at night, Mama comes *trotting* in from wherever she has been in the house. She *hops* up on the bed, *steps* over my upper body and onto my pillow, *shifts* around until her head faces my feet, then *stretches* to lie down--her face next to mine, her shoulder and ribs *leaning* lightly against my jaw, her front feet placed on my chest. Her soft fur *nestles* in beside my cheek, her purr starts its steady putt-putt motorboat sound. She lies there, as if waiting. I *pat* her with my hand, *stroking* slowly along her back. She *stretches* out further, *snuggling* closer, as her purring continues. In five or ten minutes, when she *considers* that I have been tucked in, she's up and gently off to some other spot in the house.

Introduction: Why Consider Vivid Verbs

With the focus here on vivid, or strong, verbs, we enter craft areas that—though they are fairly commonly taught and quite important—may not be familiar or immediately grasped by student writers and also may not be lessons in all writing teachers' repertoires.

If we think of the usual rubric for rating or scoring papers, these rubrics tend to have categories like:

- content/development (which includes, fundamentally, a need for skill in selecting which examples or scenes to tell and then skill in selecting essential or relevant sensory detail);
- organization (a highly important craft issue, of course, that we will get to in chapter 11); and

- a category often labeled as "style" or "voice." This category is, for many teachers, harder to define. What makes up style or voice can be harder to point your finger to.

When Paul Diederich, in many ways the father of this modern development of rubrics, was talking about voice, he explained with respect to effective use of voice, "You can tell it wasn't written by a committee" (1974). That is a humorous pass at a definition but doesn't give us precise guidance.

I would submit that there are ways to be more specific about style, and one of these ways is to focus more on words and word choice—the appropriateness of the word choice to the topic and event, and the power or effectiveness of the word choice to add to the meaning and effect of the piece.

There are two categories of word choice that I will talk about in this book. In this chapter, as its title suggests, I will be focusing on making effective use of the verbs, or action words, in a piece of writing. In chapter 10, I will be focusing on using precise nouns, naming or labeling the characters and elements of the writing piece as precisely and potently as possible.

What I Say to Students: What, How, Why

What immediately follows here is both what I say aloud and also something I make copies of for students.

I say, "There is no more important word choice than the choices involved with the verbs or action words of our story or essay. Our language may lead us to frequent use of the 'to be' verbs—*is*, *are*, *was*, *were*—or to the usual or standard verbs for basic actions—*came* and *went*, for example. On one level, there is nothing wrong with using these verbs—in fact, our language is constructed so that sometimes we *will* necessarily use these words. However, it is good to practice using verbs that are more precise. *Is*, *are*, *was*, and/or *were*, we might say, can get the job done. However, these verbs have absolutely no energy, no personality, and they are not specifically revealing about what is going on with the topic of our writing.

"So, when we can, we'd like to characterize someone coming into the room as *slipped* into the room, *ambled* into the room, *strolled* into the room, *hurried* into the room, *raced* into the room, *staggered* into the room, *stumbled* into the room … You get the idea. And we'd like to *not* say *was* in the room or *came* into the room. Our writing picks up life and energy when we say, 'She *dazzled* us with her stories about Africa, rather than, 'She *was telling* us about Africa.'"

There is a common misconception about strong verbs, not so very different from a common misconception about the use of metaphor. With

metaphors, student writers at first may think that "the more metaphors, the better." So, writing that is cluttered with metaphors will be celebrated as "creative," when it is probably congested and confusing.

Saying that a baby had a face "round and red as a balloon," that her tears were streaming down her face "like a monsoon rain against the window," and that she was "bouncing up and down like a jack-in-the-box" as she continued in her frustration would be less creative than confusing, I would argue. A balloon carries the tone of a party, and a jack-in-the box carries the tone of a toy (or playtime). And the "monsoon" reference is probably hyperbole, exaggerating the actual amount of tears. All in all, the cluster of metaphors confuses us about what the baby is experiencing and communicating.

Better with metaphors, as I suggested in the chapter on metaphor, is to extend and develop one or two essential metaphors—metaphors that capture the emotional essence of what you are writing about—than to mix a batch of metaphors together that can be as much a distraction as substance.

Similarly, with strong verbs, sometimes developing writers, once they are aware of the possibility of using vivid verbs instead of weak ones, will seek to produce a steady flow of vividness in their writing. At first, as a teacher-mentor, I would probably celebrate the appearance of strong verbs after the craft lesson as a helpful experimental step for the writer. So, I would at first praise any vivid verb attempt as a valuable experiment, even if the experiment utilized overly ornate verbs or too many vivid verbs in a short passage. However, after a short time, I would try to help writers, even young ones, begin to realize that there are at least two additional issues here. (Perhaps these two issues are the topics of the next mini lessons on verbs.)

One issue is that of pace and rhythm. Strong verbs can have more of an impact on a reader if they are delivered in a balanced way along with less-vivid verbs. An emphasized note or note sequence in music is all the more effective, at times, because it is balanced by quieter sections of music that create a contrast for the listener.

The second issue is that high intensity, or maximum vividness, is simply not always the goal of the writer or of a section of a narrative or essay.

If we go too far with strong verbs, they can sound odd to our readers, or the verbs can exaggerate what happened in a way that is not helpful. To say, "He *charged* the birthday cake" might be just right, if that was an important event, but it might be exaggerated overstatement (hyperbole) if what we really want to communicate is how he quietly shared the cake in the next moment.

So, strong verbs should serve our writing purpose by giving energy to important or essential actions. We need to spend our strong verbs, almost like money, on the parts that need the most energy—wild energy *or* soft energy.

I would also make the point for students here that strong verbs can sometimes help us get rid of the need for the "-ly" ending adverbs that writers sometimes use to pump up the action of a verb. As with the "to be" verbs, we are not trying to get rid of all of the "-ly" adverbs—they have an appropriate place in the language, clarifying how or with what force an action occurs. However, sometimes, we can get the most precise sense of an action, and with the fewest words, by getting just the right verb, therefore eliminating the need for the "-ly" adverb.

Here are some examples of particular, precise verbs that I believe can say more and communicate more about the tone or atmosphere of an action than a weaker verb. I have included a few examples of how careful verb choice might eliminate the need or desire for the "-ly" adverb.

We might further our thinking about strong verbs with a brainstorming of our own classroom list such as this of what we are seeking as writers:

List of Some Strong Verb Examples (Limiting Use of the "-ly" Adverb):

- "Glimpsed," "noticed," "stared," "peered at," "watched"—not "saw" or "looked at carefully"
- "Gulped," "wolfed down," or "slurped up" the food—not "ate hungrily"
- "Grabbed," "snatched," "seized," "gathered"—not "was picking up" or "picked up quickly"
- The leaves "fluttered," "whispered," "rippled," "swished"—not "moved"—in the wind
- She "stalked" out, "barged" out, "sneaked" out—not "went" out—of the room

Mentor Text Examples: Dialogic Teaching

Here are some mentor text examples with what I consider to be the strong verbs italicized.

Mentor Text One:

I Am Not Your Perfect Mexican Daughter, by Erika L. Sanchez

> The wind is starting to *provoke* the water, and a big beefy cloud *drifts* towards us. I can see the faint and hazy Chicago skyline across the lake. It'll probably rain soon, which will make the day even worse. Pasquel walks toward me, looking up at the sky with his mouth wide open, as if he's never seen it before.
>
> "You don't know what you're talking about," I say. (p.131)

I include this passage because it is an example of how one perfect vivid verb can carry the energy and purpose of a whole passage of narration. To me, this word is "provoke." It is the most vivid verb in the passage, I would say, although "drifts" is also expressive of how the clouds are moving. At this point in the story, our main character, Julia, is trying to come to grips with her sister's death and her great feeling of loss, and she and Pasquel are having an argument about it. She is feeling profoundly provoked in life by the loss of her sister, and she and Pasquel are provoking one another in their argument, and these issues and tensions are powerfully carried to us by the word "provoke," although the word is subtly kept one step removed by the fact that it refers to the wind provoking the water.

Mentor Text Two:

A Wrinkle in Time, by Madeleine L'Engle

> Meg began to cry, to *sob* aloud. Through her tears she could see Charles Wallace standing there, very small, very white. Calvin put his arms around her, but she *shuddered* and *broke* away, *sobbing* wildly. Then she was *enfolded* in the great wings of Mrs. Whatsit and she felt comfort and strength *pouring* through her. (p.84)

This scene occurs at a dramatic point in the story where Meg is so frustrated and sad she might give up on trying to rescue her father, feeling that it is impossible. It is a moment of reckoning, not just one of several moments of hardship. She is not just tearful but "sobbing." The fact that she "broke away" from a hug shows she is almost beyond comfort. Only being "enfolded" (completely wrapped within) what feels like the angel wings of Mrs. Whatsit is an action capable of comforting her in her deep moment of grief. The strong verbs capture both the depth of her despair and also the completeness of the comforting moment. It is these verb choices that especially carry the scene with the emotion and artistry we have come to expect of Madeleine L'Engle's writing.

Mentor Text Three:

The Wagon, by Johnston and Ransome

> Master *strolled* around it, slow.
> *Smacked* one side. *Inspected* the wheels
> sharp and close, like an auctioneer
> *checks* a horse—
> or a slave.
> I longed to *climb* atop that wagon and *roll*
> Away.

I include this example because it is a good demonstration of how precise—and even strong—verbs can be used to help establish a quiet intensity, a kind of building tension, rather than dramatic action (like the dramatic moment in *Wrinkle in Time*). Precise verbs can greatly enhance and energize quiet action, as well as vigorous action.

Mentor Text Four:

Up North at the Cabin, by Marsha Wilson Chall

> I *clutch* the rope,
> *bobbing* up and down in my yellow life vest.
> The motor *sputters* softly, waiting.
> My legs *stiffen* in the skis.
> "Hit it!" I *yell*.

We can see, in even this brief passage from Chall's book, that she is intent in her search for expressive and precise verbs. They are very much a part of the writing style she seeks and also one of the prominent reasons why we as readers are gripped by the action of her text. Further, her use of the nicely expressive word "sputters" is not harmed, but rather is clarified by the adverb "softly." We are not trying to get rid of all "-ly" adverbs, just make them a less prominent part of our word-choice repertoire than they might be if we were less diligent in finding the right verbs.

Example five is my poem used in an earlier chapter to represent the extended metaphor. The extended metaphor is one reason the poem seems to work when I read it aloud to others. However, the vivid verbs are also an important part of how the poem works.

Mentor Text Five:

The Visit, by Richard Koch

> Here they come, those starlings,
> *flapping* into the bird-feeding station
> like a motorcycle gang
> *descending* on Joe's Diner,
> *scattering* other customers
> like mud under their tires,
>
> each unkempt comb
> like the upturned collar
> on a leather jacket.
> With all the ease
> of strong, sharp beaks
> and Harleys waiting out front,

they *strut* straight for the suet
and *pull* up a stool.

"We're here, what's it to ya?
Let's eat."

Making the Vivid Verbs Mentor-Text Study Dialogic

My usual dialogic approach to the mentor text part of this lesson is to offer my think-aloud example of how I would go about identifying the strong verbs in one of the mentor text examples—perhaps those in Chall's *Up North at the Cabin*. Then I may ask the students, "Are you ready to go on a vivid verbs treasure hunt?" Usually, the answer is yes. I then will put them in a situation where they are in a collaborative group with one or two or three others. The task is to at first on your own briefly and then with your group collaboratively to underline the strong verbs in one of the remaining passages. So, if there are three passages remaining (including my poem, "The Visit"), about one-third of the room will be assigned each passage—but they will still do their analysis in their own small three-person group.

Then I have the groups report out to the whole group. We stay with one particular passage until the one-third of the room assigned to it have said what they wish to say. Then we move on to another passage for the small groups to report out on their passage until we have completed our treasure hunt on the passages. If certain individuals want to report out on a verb that they find "strong" even though others may not, that is all the better. That student has found an additional treasure nugget for us.

Where the Calico Cat Comes In

In this case, because, as I have been saying, strong verbs can be used to achieve various stylistic purposes and not just to produce high drama—and because a common misconception among inexperienced writers is that the strong verbs should push the reader's action meter higher—I have developed two examples of strong verbs that might be used for helpful but very different purposes in the calico cat narrative essay. In the first example, the real-life experience had been that Mama had been missing for one month.

Vivid Verbs: The Calico Cat Essay

1) Calico Cat--Verbs for Fast Action in a Dream

   After about a month, I had a dream. Mama came galloping toward me across a field—healthy and whole. Her gait rolled along easy and free, as if striding toward something, not bolting away from something. Her

three colors of white, orange, and black swirled in movement like a Picasso painting of a cat. I seemed absent from this picture, but somehow, I sensed I stood at the edge, waiting, where I anticipated Mama's arrival. In my dream, I could almost feel my heart race, and my dizzying, light-headed sense of elation.

2) Calico Cat--Verbs for a Quiet Moment at Bedtime

Now, when I go to bed at night, Mama comes trotting in from wherever she has been in the house. She hops up on the bed, steps over my upper body and onto my pillow, shifts around until her head faces my feet, then stretches to lie down— her face next to mine, her shoulder and ribs leaning lightly against my jaw, her front feet placed on my chest. Her soft fur nestles in beside my cheek, her purr starts its steady putt-putt motorboat sound. She lies there, as if waiting. I pat her with my hand, stroking slowly along her back. She stretches out further, snuggling closer, as her purring continues. In five or ten minutes, when she considers that I have been tucked in, she's up and gently off to some other spot in the house.

When I refer to this craft step as use of "vivid," or "strong," verbs I feel that is appropriate because we are trying to select verbs that strongly convey, and even vividly convey, the action, tone, and nuance of what we are writing about. However, it is possible that a better name for this craft step is the use of "precise" verbs—in fact, you may have observed me utilizing that word a bit as this chapter proceeds. There is a sense in which the verbs in the second calico cat scene are not strong, but rather, they are gentle. They are strong perhaps in an artistic sense—they strongly convey the mood. However, their precision serves to bring out the gentleness and quietness and softness of the moment.

One way to highlight the possible exaggerated use of strong verbs is to give one or two examples of "over the top." Explain that when the action is already high, we don't want over-dramatic verbs that will make the reader experience the action as melodrama. If we have an action sequence in which a person gets shot and falls from a cliff, we don't want elevated emotional language such as "Once hit by the bullet, he heaved himself to the edge, pirouetted out into space, and plunged to his doom." I realize most writers perhaps would not err to this melodramatic extent, but I have found that young writers enjoy this example and can benefit from being taught that exaggerated (hyperbolic) action is not the goal—rather, our goals are strength of the artistic achievement and precision of the action and emotion. Normally, the students enjoy a good chuckle over my melodrama example.

Usually, I do not analyze these calico cat passages for the students. Because the calico cat examples closely follow the other mentor-text examples, and because we have just practiced the "treasure hunt" approach to the mentor texts, I simply assign one-half of the room to each of the calico cat examples. First, each individual underlines strong verbs they find in their passage, then they discuss in turn-and-talk pairs, and then each half of the room reports out on their passage to the whole group.

The Student Task: Have a Go—Students Doing

The have a go step of this lesson—if just presented as "Now, use some vivid verbs in your writing"—may leave students in a relatively unscaffolded situation. A more limited and scaffolded task for this moment is for the student writer to pause to study about two paragraphs, or perhaps one page, of a piece of writing they are working on, and to review the verb choices in that section of the writing, with an eye toward changing out the "to be" verbs, and also *came* and *went*, for stronger, more vivid and precise verbs. The writer underlines the verbs to be changed out in this passage and then, in the margins or on a separate sheet or notebook page, lists a few brainstorming guesses of stronger, more vivid verbs that might replace the underlined target. Trying to think of two or three possible verb choices to replace each targeted weak verb is a good goal. Then the writer rewrites the chosen sentence with the new, better verb choice.

Of course, the writer might focus on a quiet, intimate scene moment, or the writer might focus on an active, dramatic moment. Either can benefit from utilizing the most precise and artistic verbs possible. And the teacher can remind folks to experiment in a free-flowing way with brainstorming lists of possible verbs, as offered by my list-making of verbs in the "What I Say to Students" section of this chapter.

As with several of the previous student task sections, it may be quite useful, after ten minutes or so, to pair up a struggling writer—one who feels unsuccessful in their verb search—with one or two of their peers who are feeling just a bit more settled with the task: that is, who feel they had at least modest success taking out weaker, less expressive verbs and putting in more precise and expressive verbs.

Sharing Out in a Supportive Environment

Depending on the amount of time available, the teacher can invite a "read around," during which all writers get the opportunity to share one sentence in which they have made a verb change—sharing both the old passage and then the new passage, with emphasis on the words taken out and the words added in.

Another traditional sharing session would involve either asking for two or three volunteers, perhaps from among those who feel they have had some success with the craft experiment, to share their results, and then inviting the class to both support the change attempts by noticing what the writer is trying to achieve, but also inviting a few questions and possibly a suggestion or two.

It is also possible, time permitting, to ask one or two students to share their difficulty with the task in the whole group. They share their sentence as is, mentioning the verb they wish to replace. Then the class gently brainstorms possible verbs for the spot. The writer may jot down several of the brainstormed possibilities or just seize on the one they like best. This often produces both wonderful practice for the whole group—thinking up strong verbs—and also good results for the person who needed help.

Discourse Review: Restorative Conversations

In most workshop classrooms I have been in, there are some student writers who are consistently more ready to share than others. So, in addition to the read-around approach and the volunteering approach, it is important to schedule the sharing so that, sooner or later, all students are included. In rare cases, in which one or two students are so shy or reticent that it is difficult to get them to share their writing ever, the teacher can both make sure the classroom is a safe and supportive place to share and also prepare the reticent students for an eventual sharing moment by coaxing them toward it and by helping them to have successful experiments they can then joyfully select to share.

Briefly and calmly discussing with a student in a few moments before or after class your wish that they would share soon—and letting them make a guess about how soon they might share—is something that seems so simple I am surprised at how much success I get from this approach. It surprises me how often the teacher asking, "Do you think you could share next session?" is responded to by the student nodding yes. Also, sometimes, after I have helped a student get a good result by conferencing with them during a have a go session, I will nudge them by asking at sharing time, "Mark, I know you have a good example. Would you please share it?" If Mark shakes his head no, I will gently say, "Okay, maybe sometime soon," and move on.

Common Missteps: Supportive Coaching Moves

There are two common difficulties or errors students experience in their practice on strong verbs, both during the have a go session and then in

subsequent writing. I have alluded to both of these issues above. I will just reiterate briefly how to handle them. First, after this lesson, I have found students (of varying ages) often seem irresistibly drawn to over-dramatic verb choices for a while. So, their passages will include either five strong verbs in one sentence (now *I* am exaggerating) or just one verb perhaps—but that one verb will be hyperbolic over-drama for the moment being depicted. As with the problem of too many metaphors or of dramatic-but-not-apropos metaphors, the main remedy, I believe, is patience. No harm is being done to the universe during this over-dramatic practice period. So, we can trust that our PQS supportive response (mainly praising the effort being put into practicing the use of strong verbs), plus our continued coaching in conferencing and our (and their) providing more mentor-text examples, will work this tendency out over time.

The other problem is reticence or difficulty for the writer getting a flow of stronger verbs going in their craft work. I am not a fan of the thesaurus for this problem—which to me often provides what feels like an artificial solution to the word-choice problem. I would much prefer the combination of writing circle "help sessions" in which the writer asks their group to brainstorm strong verbs for them in places they have selected in their writing, combined with an ongoing "strong verbs treasure hunt" in the literary texts we are reading in and outside of the classroom.

*TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING TIP #4—MEDITATION

WHAT

Meditation is so often part of mindfulness that many people equate the two. However, in mindfulness studies, and in this book, mindfulness is a larger concept having to do with paying close attention, slow looking, and caring about the other and the situation. It has to do with what Jon Kabat-Zinn referred to as "deep inhabiting" of the moment. Meditation is normally an additional activity that can help the person pause and recover—or ponder and go deeper—so they are once again ready to go back to life while paying attention and with a caring attitude.

So, meditation, if included as part of the classroom experience or as part of the school experience, can definitely help us achieve a mindful writing workshop in our teaching work. I strongly recommend it!

WHY

Meditation can help separate the person from the flow of "what is," allowing for moments to rest the conscious brain and to recover from current stress, helping the person grow toward peace and calmness. Meditation can help the person go deeper in their reflective thinking. Meditation can help the person strengthen their heart contact and deepen their emotional understanding of people and events. Meditation sometimes helps us see possibilities that were hidden behind life's busyness but that now arise for us in calmness. In short, including meditation in the classroom adds a potent restorative activity that helps students grow as persons as they grow their academic learning. It helps advance the overall learning by restoring and growing the learners toward their best selves.

I would also assure teachers that meditation is not likely to carry with it any drawbacks, nor is it especially difficult. You can practice it yourself and also guide students to meditate without elaborate training. The teacher reading about meditation or taking lessons is, of course, to be desired.

Teachers sometimes worry about student resistance to meditation. However, resistance more often comes from parents. Of course, parents should be informed and consulted before including meditation in school. And, of course, meditation should be optional for the student—although

students who opt out will need some other quiet activity they can do while the rest are meditating. If guiding students to meditate is controversial at your school, you can go online to acquire the research that now clarifies the emotional and academic benefits of including meditation in the school day. You can also agree to start by incorporating meditation only in certain classes or even agree to start meditation as an afterschool activity.

Students typically experience meditation very positively. Any difficult emotions or experiences of sorrow or sadness that might occur can be dealt with as you would deal with such emotions in any other context—mainly with supportive counseling and offers of other trauma-informed steps for calming and bringing peace. Also, the student can write about it.

HOW

Normally, you close your eyes when you meditate so that you can turn your attention inward, rather than focusing on what is going on around you. It is perfectly okay to practice meditation in brief episodes of three minutes or five minutes. And ten minutes of meditation can be a lot for young learners. If I had my own classroom, I would engage students in meditation every day. Here are five kinds of meditation, all of which I have personally practiced:

1. Breathing in and breathing out: Noticing your breaths. This is really just a more self-conscious version of the deep breathing described earlier in the "calming down" ideas. The person/student takes an informal meditation pose—sitting on the floor or sitting in a chair, relatively erect, eyes closed, hands resting on legs or knees—or hands folded in a classic meditation pose. Then you breathe in slowly and then out slowly (about five seconds each), paying attention to your breathing. When your mind wanders off of your breaths, you remind yourself to notice your breaths. Some practitioners speak silently inside their heads, saying, "I am breathing in; I am breathing out."
2. One-pointed meditation: With this form, you keep your eyes open, because it utilizes some object as your total focus while you meditate. People who are practicing a certain religion may use a sacred object for this meditation. However, this is also done with a lit candle, keeping your eyes on the burning flame. I have done this with students, and when I do, I always make use of some object I have provided for them. For example, not long ago in a creative writing class, I provided everyone a small, one-inch-high toy rubber frog

and also a white napkin. In sacred object meditation the object is often placed on a white cloth to provide the object its own space—so my white napkin was for placing their frog on during meditation. The information I provided included that the frog is the symbol of "transformation" (becoming our better self) in some Native American traditions. I asked them to meditate on their frog for ten minutes three times per week and then to write in their notebook after each meditation. My hope for them was that they would become more clear in their own heads about how they could use our time together to become better writers and also to grow themselves as people.

3. Love meditation: To the best of my knowledge I invented this love meditation. It is a practice I believe could be used in both public and private schools as an alternative to spiritual meditation (described below). This meditation is based on a spiritual practice the Franciscans have called "prayer of inner quiet." It is also sometimes called "sitting in silence." The idea is that you are not requesting a "something" nor focusing on a concrete goal. Rather, you are trying to make yourself open. In spiritual meditation you are trying to open yourself up to the connection to the spiritual realm. I have somewhat narrowed the goal here to a process where we try to make ourselves open to the insights provided by love. The way I would present this to students is to say, "There are three kinds of love I want us to think about. First, there is love for yourself: respecting your abilities and needs, and caring for yourself. Second, there is love for others: respecting their abilities and needs, and taking care of them. Both of these are very important types of love. Third, there is also the step you can take to act in love toward yourself, toward people, or toward the world. That is very important also, to make your love active. In our love meditation, I want you to try to focus on any of these three types of love—for yourself, for others, or on how you can make your love active. When your mind wanders or gets distracted—and this will happen a lot—just pull yourself back to thinking about breathing in and out for a moment. Then go back to focusing on love, trying to hear and notice what love wants you to know."

Sometimes, the religious version of this meditation is derived from Psalm 46:10, "Be still and know that I am God." Of course, this need not be referred to in school. However, I would share with students a statement from Dominican Sister Sylvia Rosell, who explains, "If you still your mind, you can hear your heart" (2018).

4. Gratefulness meditation (plus joy, peace, and kindness): The gratefulness meditation is a basic Buddhist meditation. In it you simply choose to focus on what you are grateful for at that time. With eyes closed, silently you begin by being grateful for the mother-love you have received, regardless of whether you received that from a birth mother or from others. Mother-love is gentle, supportive love and may be received from a father, as well as a mother, or received from someone not related to you by blood. Then, in no special order, you silently list to yourself things you are grateful for, some big and some small. Listing small things, like a sunny morning, a flower you saw, or a kind word from someone, can both help keep you going with the meditation and also help you realize how much you have to be grateful for. The beauty of this mediation is that, even if you feel grouchy before you begin, the meditation process often helps you get refilled with goodwill. It is restorative to be grate-ful. If you want to take this approach but do not want to wear out your students' gratitude, you can vary this at different times to focus instead on joy(s), moments (or places) of peace, or kindnesses—both given and received—that the person can think of while meditating.
5. Spiritual meditation: In this form of meditation you once again close your eyes, turning your attention inward. The goal of this meditation is to achieve a state something like open prayerfulness, where you are quietly seeking contact with the Beloved Divine whose presence can be found deep within. In many religions the essential way to be in contact with the Divine is to seek the place inside your consciousness—inside your heart—where your immortal soul and the omniscient love of the Divine intersect. I am guessing that most teachers will not feel free to engage their students in this type of meditation because of its religious aspects. However, I include it here for two reasons: a) because it is an important type of meditation and b) because trauma-sensitive guidebooks, such as Susan Craig's *Trauma-Sensitive Schools*, strongly recommend that teachers utilizing trauma-informed practices also engage in self-care, so they can sustain their teaching. Spiritual meditation is an important type of self-care for those who desire to practice it. This prayerful meditation can put you in touch with your better intuitions, can help put you at peace about troubles, and can help you feel open to the power of the Divine.

CHAPTER 10

Craft Lesson #7: Precise Nouns (Calling Things What They Exactly Are)

Life consists of small things, just your ego goes on saying these are small things.

—Osho

Precise Nouns: The Calico Cat Story

1) Calico Cat--Arriving Home: Precise Nouns

   The very next *evening*, we arrived home about 10:00 p.m. from a movie night, and there, on the *railing* of our back deck, was Mama. Of course, I immediately let her in the house. In the inside light, I could see she might have lost half her weight. I put down her *bowl* with the usual dry food, and she hurried to it, but she didn't seem to think she could eat it. So, I put down a *dish* of water. She at first lapped at it tentatively, and then she drank it up. She probably had been shut away in someone's *shed* or *garage*. Maybe they had finally returned. Who knows what *scraps*, *bugs*, or *rodents* had kept her alive for that month she was missing. But here she was, and she was going to survive.

2) Philosophical Introduction to the Calico Cat Essay: Precise Nouns

   There is an *argument* among modern *scientists* about how much animals can think, about how much they *understand* and *feel*. One *Native American cosmology* story has it that *wolves* and humans were created at the same time and placed together so that the wolf could protect and care for the human until the human grew stronger. Now, wolves and humans travel separately, but it is still true that they are bonded, and whatever happens to one will at some point also happen to the other.

Introduction: Why Consider Precise Nouns

A focus on precise nouns has some things in common with the focus on vivid verbs: Both are focuses on individual words or on short phrases. Both are keys to precision in writing and also keys to effective achievement of voice or style. If we have a strong positive response to a book, poem, or article, it is likely to be the case that the piece of writing is highly effective in its selection of strong verbs and precise nouns.

One of the reasons that a reader is likely to respond to changes in these two craft areas is, of course, for the grammatical reason that these are the two fundamental parts of any English sentence—the verb being the action of the sentence and the noun being the subject, or object, of the sentence, either the subject doing the action or the object being acted upon. So, by teaching craft lessons on these two important aspects of the sentence

(verbs and nouns), we are striking close to the heart of the issues of word choice of any writer and any piece of writing.

Effective word choice in relation to verbs and nouns can clean up a writer's style by lessening the need for the "-ly" adverb and lessening the need for adjectives. As with the "-ly" adverb, adjectives are not "wrong" to make use of in our writing, of course. However, less experienced and less skilled writers often will use too many "-ly" adverbs because their verbs lack the desired energy and will add too many adjectives because they have not been as careful and skillful as possible in selecting their nouns.

What I Say to Students: What, How, Why

Professional writers learn to choose their words carefully so that each word means as much as it can. This is partly why we feel carried along when we read professional writers' work. They have learned to paint an exact picture for us—with sensory details but also with precise nouns that make the pictures and examples in their writing come alive for us.

A fifth grader in a school I was working with recently wrote, "As the airplane lifted higher into the air, the lake became a pond, and then the pond became a puddle."

He could have written about how "the lake got smaller and smaller," but we wouldn't have visualized the sight quite so specifically nor enjoyed the words quite so much as we do with his precise nouns.

Often, when we are doing freewriting in order to explore our writing topic and in order to get some words down on paper so that we can get a piece started, it is better not to fuss too much about strong verbs and precise nouns. If they come to us, that is a good thing, and indeed, once we have learned about these craft steps, we may find ourselves making better word choices, even in freewriting. However, it is better not to worry too much about this type of thing in the early stages of developing a piece; otherwise, our freewriting will not be very free. We may become less able to let our ideas flow—and getting a flow of ideas and events started is the key of this early freewriting part of a rough draft.

When we revise, however, we can work more carefully for vivid verbs and for the most precise noun—or name—for something. Instead of a "very small river," we can think of different sizes of flowing water: a trickle, a creek, a brook, a stream, a channel, a rapids, a river. Not "big rock," but "boulder." Not "small rock" but "stone" or "pebble."

We can find, or learn, the names for things we are writing about—for trees of different sizes, for example, a "seedling" or "sapling," not just "a young tree." We can try not to say "flower" but to say instead "daisy," and

not say "bird" but say instead "robin," and not say "car" but say instead "red Ford Mustang convertible."

Sometimes, this preciseness involves research—one writing teacher sent his student to the hardware store to identify exactly what shovel she needed for her story. Another writing teacher asked his student to replace the phrase "interesting eyes" with details of what made them interesting—their "ocean-blue gaze" perhaps.

Sometimes, this research involves knowing the tools of a certain kind of world or situation, and sometimes, it involves just looking closely. In Avi's *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*, the knife Charlotte receives from the ship's cook is a dirk, which, because it is a knife label used in previous centuries, somehow makes the whole story seem historic and more authentic. In Goble's *The Girl Who Loved Wild Horses*, the leader of the wild horses is a "spotted stallion." This is not many words, nor an especially technical naming, but it specifies what kind of horse just enough for us to experience him.

So, as a writer you can: 1) think of the best nouns or names you can as you review a section of your writing, 2) read around in a few books on your topic, or on a similar topic, to see what nouns those authors use, or 3) do some research about your topic online or in informational books to see what nouns are used there.

Mentor Text Examples: Dialogic Teaching

Mentor Text One:

Habibi, by Naomi Shihab Nye

In *Habibi* by Naomi Shihab Nye, Liyana, an early teenager, has just arrived with her family at the destination of their move from St. Louis to Palestine. The strangeness of everything in this new world is communicated partly by the careful sensory detail and partly by noun word choices (emphasis added through italics):

> Had she thought Jerusalem would have a *halo*? She certainly didn't think about—*diesel exhaust*. They passed the *military checkpoint* surrounded by *striped orange sawhorses*. In the bustling Arab town of Ramallah, everyone walked around carrying large *mesh shopping bags*. A man with a *tray* of round flat breads stacked sky-high grinned at Liyana through the car window when their eyes met.
>
> Then the taxi headed into the rural West Bank of *orchards* and tiny *villages*, each with its own *minaret* and perched houses. Liyana said, "It's gorgeous here!" (p. 51)

By now, you are seeing that my usual approach to making mentor-text searches dialogic is to begin with a teacher think-aloud about how she or he would analyze one mentor-text example, and then to ask students in pairs or small groups to analyze a next mentor-text example and report out to the group. This can be balanced back and forth a bit. If the students don't get the hang of it quickly, the teacher can do an additional think-aloud modeling of how another mentor text might be examined. Also, the teacher can invite and support a give-and-take in which the students briefly discuss or even debate where the mentor text shows the craft step being presented. It is also both a fun and rewarding transition for students to alternate with the teacher, pointing out her or his noticings in an individual mentor text, and then to invite and allow the students to be in the lead with the next mentor-text example. Of course, different readers notice different parts, and with all of our noticings, both teacher and students, we will get the richest and most rewarding insights.

In the *Habibi* passage above, relative to sensory detail and precise nouns, I especially notice "diesel" exhaust (not just "exhaust"), "striped orange sawhorses," "large mesh shopping bags" (the "mesh" in particular is a precise adjective), a "tray" of round flat breads, and "minaret," which is a precise name for the tops of the mosques Liyana was seeing and which identifies both the geographical place we are in and an important aspect of the culture. In this case, "car" is just left as a relatively unidentified "taxi." I believe this is an apt choice by Nye because Liyana is seeing her surroundings, and, from inside the car, she is not seeing the car itself.

Mentor Text Two:

Elijah of Buxton, by Christopher Paul Curtis

In the next passage from *Elijah of Buxton* by Christopher Paul Curtis, we see just how immersed in a time and a story we can be by the author utilizing the precise names and authentic proper names for things. Elijah, as the book jacket reminds us, "is the first child born into freedom in Buxton, Canada, a settlement of runaway slaves just over the border from Detroit."

In this section, Elijah, now eleven years old, has been carrying a small baby—handed to him by a shackled, enslaved mother—back from the United States side of the river to Canada. They have almost arrived. The passage gets energy and life from the powerful moment it occurs in the story and from Elijah's authentic-sounding child talk ("growned-ups"), but also from Curtis's use of precise names (ferry) and proper names for places. We are placed in a world lush with proper names for geographic places—

so many names that we feel an extra sense that we know where we are, and we are present—names like "Belle Isle." And we have the name of a local business in Buxton that will be one of our destinations: "MacMahon's Dry Goods." The fact that we are immersed in the names for places and things gives the passage an underlayer of credibility that makes the action all the more meaningful and involving for us:

> Whilst we waited for the ferry to carry us to *Windsor*, I started wondering what would happen to Hope once we got to *Buxton*. But I knowed pretty quick. I knowed Mrs. Brown was probably gonna be able to buy some cloth with some colour in it from *MacMahon's Dry Goods*.
>
> When the sun started peeking over the trees on *Belle Isle* I knowed I had to welcome Hope to *Canada* the right way, the same way growned folks do.
>
> I pointed over to *Canada* and said to her, "Looky there! Look at that sky!
>
> Ain't that the most beautifullest sky you ever seen?" (p. 340)

Mentor Text Three:

Grandmother's Pigeon, by Louise Erdrich

In *Grandmother's Pigeon* by Louise Erdrich, the three pigeon eggs will become the most important elements of the story—they hatch into baby carrier pigeons, which are supposed to be extinct, and they then cause all sorts of commotion for the family. So, in the opening section, it seems most appropriate—and also adds credibility to Grandmother's knowledge of birds and to the family's "closer than usual" involvement with birds—when we are walked through the specific ingredients of the different nests Grandmother has collected and saved:

> The nest made of *horsehair* was my brother's favorite. I liked the hummingbird's, no bigger than my *fingernail*, created with stolen *spiderwebs*. There was a nest of *sticks and yarn*, a swallow's nest, the *sacklike* nest of a Baltimore Oriole, a goldfinch nest cunningly woven of *milkweed floss* and strips of *birch bark*, and one of rough *twigs* that contained three eggs.

Mentor Text Four:

Mirandy and Brother Wind, by Patricia McKissack

"In *Mirandy and Brother Wind* by Patricia McKissack**,"** I say to students, "The style is clean, and the language is interesting overall." But then I take the treasure-hunt approach by adding, "I am especially interested to point out one mysterious word. I wonder if you can guess what that word is as you read the short passage below?"

> Following the creek downstream, Mirandy come to Mis Poinsettia's whitewashed cottage. Talk had it that Mis Poinsettia wasn't a for real conjure woman like the ones in New Orleans. But didn't nobody mess with her, just in case talk was wrong.
>
> Mis Poinsettia welcomed Mirandy inside. "Your people don't approve of conjure. Why come you here?" she say.

I appreciate many things about this passage: the way the rural setting is constructed with the word "creek" and the phrase "whitewashed cottage," the exotic names of the characters, and the verb phrase "mess with" that communicates the "country" and colloquial point of view of our main character, Mirandy. I also appreciate the use of dialogue, as we get to hear Mis Poinsettia speak.

However, the word I most especially notice in this passage is the word "conjure," which is a word that can be used as a verb meaning to conjure up magic or spirits—or perhaps to conjure up a cure for someone's physical ailment. So, the word carries all of those implications with it. In this passage, however, it is used as a noun, part of a noun phrase to identify that Mis Poinsettia might be a "conjure woman," and then as a noun object, the object of what folks don't approve of.

Because "conjure" is another term—both as a verb and a noun—for a kind of rural or tribal magic, or even sorcery, the whole tone, and even much of the purpose of the story, is established by the fact that Mirandy has started off the main action by coming, most likely against the wishes of her "people," to visit this "conjure woman."

So, an interesting thing about precise nouns is that they reveal, often, the knowledge level of the writer: either their knowledge of shovels (as in that one classroom); of a region like Palestine; of a community like the rural community that includes a "conjure woman"; or of birds' nests, as in *Grandmother's Pigeon*. If we lack this close knowledge of our topic, we may need to engage in some research to acquire that knowledge or to move on to a topic we do know up close. However, just as often as revealing our knowledge, the precise nouns reveal, simply, a care with language—the writer's care to name and show exactly what type or size of river or rock or other thing we are talking about.

Whichever the case might be, often it is the precise nouns that establish the credibility of the writer to tell this story or to author this essay. And it is the precision of the nouns that draws the reader into a type of reader belief that the story is unfolding before their eyes, so to speak, or that the essay is about real-life knowledge of the writer.

Where the Calico Cat Comes In

In the calico cat essay that I am writing, the first passage below comes at a critical moment in the story. The night before the events of this passage, I had a dream (reported in the "Strong Verbs" passage in the previous chapter), in which, after about a thirty-day absence, Mama seemed to be loping toward me.

1) Arriving Home to the Calico Cat:

> The very next *evening*, we arrived home about 10:00 p.m. from a movie night, and there, on the *railing* of our back deck, was Mama. Of course, I immediately let her in the house. In the inside light, I could see she might have lost half her weight. I put down her *bowl* with the usual dry food, and she hurried to it, but she didn't seem to think she could eat it. So, I put down a *dish* of water. She at first lapped at it tentatively, and then she drank it up. She probably had been shut away in someone's *shed* or *garage*. Maybe they had finally returned. Who knows what *scraps*, *bugs*, or *rodents* had kept her alive for that month she was missing. But here she was, and she was going to survive.

None of the words I have underlined above are exceptional, nor would they be indications that the passage is necessarily award-winning in its writing style. However, they are, I think, common examples of how precise nouns can involve relatively simple word choices that nevertheless do make a difference—a difference that adds both a sense of the credible (it seems to the reader as if this really did happen because it is happening on the page with believable precision) and a difference that makes the scene and situation more visible and visualizable to a reader.

As we read, we know we are in "evening" time—night time, but the part of night where it is common for people to be awake and doing things. We can see Mama on the "railing." We first notice her animal "bowl" being offered to her and then a "dish," most likely from the human set of dishes. We know that the writer's guess is not just that she was trapped "somewhere," but rather that it would most likely have been in a "shed" or "garage." And we get fairly specific labels for what she might have eaten in the shed or garage—"scraps, bugs, or rodents"—which allows the reader to better visualize what Mama's trapped life might have been like.

2) Philosophical Introduction to the Calico Cat Essay

> There is an *argument* among modern *scientists* about how much animals can think, about how much they *understand* and *feel*. One *Native American cosmology story* has it that *wolves* and humans were created at the same

> time and placed together so that the wolf could protect and care for the human until the human grew stronger. Now, wolves and humans travel separately, but it is still true that they are bonded, and whatever happens to one will at some point also happen to the other.

Here, as with the first calico cat passage, there is nothing highly exceptional about the prose in this passage. As with the previous passage, however, the careful word choice helps create a tone and precision to what is being discussed. "Argument" can refer to a casual quarrel or to a formal type of debate—but it suggests a disagreement that has existed over some time; otherwise, it could just be called a "disagreement." We know from the next reference to "scientists" that the writer is referring to an ongoing formal and professional disagreement—a disagreement about which even informed and studious people (scientists) differ.

And the words "understand" and "feel" identify two relatively specific mind functions, as opposed to simply mentioning how "smart" animals are. The reference to "Native American" tradition suggests that there can be a cultural and historical difference in the way people understand animals, and the word "cosmology" suggests a philosophical or spiritual level to the disagreement—a disagreement that stems from, perhaps, a misunderstanding about how wolves and humans were "created." Of course, focusing on the "wolf" adds a specific name and visual idea to the previous category, animal.

With respect to verbs, the word "protect" suggests not only a fairly exact function for wolves but contrasts with perhaps the more usual notion that a wolf might "attack." Finally, the passage suggests that wolves and humans are just, in a sense, on journeys through time in which they "travel" separately—the implication being, potentially, that even though they are traveling apart, they could still be spiritually linked.

The Student Task: Have a Go—Students Doing

The student task in this craft lesson is quite similar to the "Strong Verbs" have a go step. And I suggest similarly scaffolding this step by working with a passage of writing in a piece the student is working on. The students are asked to select a significant passage or two from their writing piece, and then they work through those passages with a focus on improving the selection of nouns in order to achieve greater precision. The teacher could suggest selecting an early passage in which some background or an opening scene might be occurring, similar to Liyana's arrival in Jerusalem or to the philosophical explanation in my second calico cat passage.

The teacher might also suggest a kind of interchanging, experimental approach, in which the student writers plug in various noun possibilities

for certain moments in a passage, searching for the most creative, interesting, or precise result. Further, the teacher might suggest that the students try to give some attention to the local or regional name for something, or give attention to the technical name for something, or give attention to a moment where an adjective is used (for size, speed, or intensity) that might be removed if the noun were more precise.

Also, similar to the strong verbs task, a small group of peers can be very helpful. After about ten minutes—when some of the students feel they have found some helpful new precise nouns and when, perhaps, other students feel they have hit a mental roadblock in their attempts—it can often be helpful to briefly form groups, whether temporary groups or usual writing circle groups. I have found that, very often, students can be helpful in brainstorming for their struggling colleagues at moments such as these.

In certain difficult cases, or in the case of entire small groups that get stuck, the teacher can join in the group brainstorming process, or the teacher can, with a particular writer's permission, open up a certain writing problem to a whole class for problem-solving and brainstorming. This can not only be a great help to the student writer who is stuck, but it can also be a good practice session for the entire class, allowing for the classroom of writers to bring up additional questions or to compare the value of one word choice in relation to another—creating a discussion of style and voice that can now be quite concrete, based in a particular writing decision in a particular passage.

Sharing Out in a Supportive Environment

The sharing-out step in this case can also be similar to the strong verb sharing out. As always, the teacher can ensure maximum opportunity for many writers to share by putting students in groups of three or in pairs to share with one another. Or the teacher can emphasize the craft-lesson focus by asking for writers to volunteer to share in the whole group if they feel they have found success with the have a go practice session on the craft-lesson issue.

It is even a useful alternative to allow for one or two students to first share fully the new steps they have taken to sharpen the precision of their noun choice, but then to add the opportunity for the students to share a section of their writing piece that they have not worked on yet in terms of this craft lesson, inviting class brainstorming and problem-solving about how to get even more precise nouns into the additional shared sections.

If student writers can begin to regularly see that their writing is often improved after a have a go experience, and if they see that small group sharing out can lead to mutual-help problem-solving, and if they sense

that even the whole class might at times intervene helpfully in the piece they are working on, then their energy and engagement with these steps of the craft lesson are often increased.

Discourse Review: Restorative Conversations

Let me just review the principles for managing discourse positively during a craft lesson. First, with mentor texts, the teacher begins (normally), clarifying with a think-aloud how she/he would analyze a certain mentor-text example. The teacher may also offer a second think-aloud on a second example if that seems helpful. However, then the teacher invites students—singly or in pairs—to offer their own analyses of one or more additional mentor-text examples.

With respect to the have a go period, students who feel stumped can receive a quick and quiet one-on-one lesson in conference from the teacher, focusing on the piece of writing the student is working on. And the have a go session can conclude with both a sharing out and a help session—both celebrating successes and also engaging in problem-solving difficulties. This should be done without judgment. A success is not better than a struggle during our have a go.

To repeat for emphasis: Struggle is desired and viewed as productive. Struggle is the step we often take to learn new things. Struggle is our friend—the friend of learning in progress.

Finally, the teacher response—and the guided student response—to the writing in progress emphasizes the protocol pattern: positive noticing of effort or approximation, followed by questions that represent not judgment, but curiosity or confusion.

Common Misstep: Supportive Coaching Moves

Although there are similarities between the vivid verbs work and the precise nouns work, there is at least one difference that occurs in have a go practice sessions. Somehow, with work on strong verbs, students often feel equipped to just go ahead and try new verbs—and students also often feel comfortable brainstorming possible verbs for writing of their peers.

However, with work on precise nouns, students may be more likely to feel stumped about how to proceed. As I have implied in earlier parts of this chapter, this may be due to the fact that the student is not yet a true expert on their topic. So, horses are still just "horses" and buildings are still just "buildings." And knives may be just knives, instead of "dirks," "switchblades," or "hunting knives."

There are two direct remedies for this lack of expert knowledge. First, the writer can pick up some books or magazines on their topic and search for interesting words used in those texts. Or the student can engage the topic even more fully and become a more serious researcher/reader of texts on the topic about which they are writing: horses, buildings in a certain geographic setting, or weapons or instruments from a certain historical period. Second, students can find someone who knows about their topic to interview—making part of that interview into a search for words used in that topic area. If a student attempts any one of these solutions, it is a good modeling of what real writers do. And, of course, getting help from a peer creates at least the two-heads-are-better-than-one situation, even if neither is an expert on the topic.

Jamal's Story

So, there I was demonstrating and modeling for a group of teachers how to get writing workshop going in their classrooms. In this case, we were in a third grade classroom, the home room teacher and the other third grade teaching staff members seated at the back of the room observing. I had helped the students generate topics so that all seemed ready to write.

I introduced the step of freewriting, quickly writing some of your thoughts or parts of your story in your notebook as a launch to a possible paper. As is often the case when good topics have been searched out, most of the students jumped in to the freewriting activity. Jamal, however, was in a different head space and engaged in activities of his own.

First, he lingeringly selected a pencil from inside his upraised desk. Then he strolled over to the pencil sharpener and sharpened his pencil, pausing to study it several times to make sure the sharpening was going well. I guessed that the teacher might have a rule about not sharpening your pencil instead of writing, but I didn't want to interrupt the otherwise good work going on in the room to address that—nor did I want to put Jamal on the spot.

Jamal then returned to his desk where the jacket he had hanging on the back of his desk chair seemed not to be hung just right. It required him to arrange it in a new way, and then to turn again and rearrange it. Since the freewriting period was only to be ten minutes, and since I hoped not to be modeling how not to succeed at getting all the students writing, I offered my first light intervention.

"Jamal," I said, "it is time to be writing, could you please get your freewriting started." Jamal ignored this, and now seemed to need to adjust the few items on his desk, pencil and notebook, a bit further. Finally, as time was nearly up, Jamal began writing.

To keep things on track, I announced, "Let's bring our freewriting to a close," which all but one of the students did. Jamal now continued writing as if he felt earnestly that he had something to say (not a bad thing for him to feel, of course). So, I allowed him to continue writing as the rest of the group and I began sharing time, with members of the group reading their freewrites aloud and the group members responding in the PQS positive response format.

In a moment, though, I decided to try to bring Jamal along, if I could. So, I strolled past his desk, paused, pointed at his pencil, and held out my hand. If he had ignored me I would have moved on rather than create a negative confrontation. However, he politely handed me his pencil. I continued my stroll to the front of the room, feeling as if I had modeled successful intervention. However, as I reached the front of the room, Jamal opened his desk, took out another pencil, and continued writing.

I was prepared to let Jamal win this small battle of wills, but then something else happened. He had apparently noted what the rest of us were doing, and soon, while still writing, he raised his hand, volunteering to share his freewrite with the group. I acknowledged him, saying, "Jamal, if you can stop writing and listen to someone else read their writing with the rest of us, then it can be your turn to share your writing too."

Jamal stopped writing and listened politely to the next student sharing, after which I called on him to read, and the students and I gave him the PQS supportive response.

Reflection on Jamal: Time is on the teacher's side

I would say that of fight, flight, or freeze Jamal was exhibiting "fight." Even though his opposition occurred at a quite peaceful level, he was conspicuously not doing as ordered/requested. Each time I sought a "win" in our battle of wills, he countered me. He did not write when instructed to with the group. He did not write when singled out with an additional request from me. He handed me his pencil but took another pencil out, knowing I was guiding him not to. None of this makes him a very big problem of course. It is important not to think we must be a successful boss at all times. We are teacher-coaches first and the first rule of love is "do no harm." We can afford to make room for student idiosyncracies that are not overly intrusive to the work.

And that is the first of two additional observations I want to make. Sometimes what a resistant student does is disruptive of the ability of the group to get work accomplished, and this must be addressed. But often resistance is quiet and non-intrusive, in which case it can be treated at that moment with benign neglect—ignored. Then, in a personal conference at some near point the teacher can take up the issue with the student, ideally in a caring, supportive way—"I'm wondering how we might get ourselves on the same page here?"

However, my second point is this. When the teacher is providing an engaging and meaningful learning opportunity—such as writing about something that matters to the student—then time is on the teacher's side. By far most students will want to become involved in the work, if you are also patient and encouraging. Jamal was used to pushing back against teacher guidance, but when he saw that: a. the rest of his community was having a fun and rewarding sharing session, and b. he had a piece of writing that was becoming meaningful to him, he found himself in a new place—desiring to share his work and join the group.

By the way, given a second chance to teach in this moment I would not take Jamal's pencil. Because I was committed to not being confrontational with Jamal, I was not concerned that I might harm him. However, when the goal of the lesson is to get students actively writing, why interrupt a student who is writing?

CHAPTER 11

Craft Lesson #8: Organizing an Essay (Two Approaches to Organization)

Two Ways To Organize The Calico Cat Story

Tell It Like a Story	*Explain the Parts*
A) First time I saw her … a scraggly calico by my neighbor's garage …	A) "Mama" has three exceptional qualities …
B) She ate on our deck, let me pick her up and hold her …	B) Patience—waited on deck for one year to become our cat …
C) I realized one day I didn't want to give her away …	C) Good taste—always chooses the best—food, place in the room, bedtime spot …
D) Most scary time, almost lost her—disappeared for a month, returned starving	D) Mental endurance, telepathy—visited in my dream when lost …
E) Conclusion: What's different between us now that she is my cat	E) What I learned about life from "Mama" is …

Introduction: Why Is Organization Difficult?

Organization is one of the most troublesome craft steps in writing. I believe there are two fundamental issues that cause this rhetorical area to be troublesome to writers. First, there are, perhaps, an infinite number of ways, legitimately, to organize a paper. Many of the rhetorical frames for engaging in critical analysis are also possible ways to organize the essay. Comparison and contrast, cause-and-effect analysis, classification and division, and even definition are time-honored, rhetorical analytical frames that are also often used as a basis for organizing.

In one of my professional incarnations, I was a technical writing teacher, and in that capacity, I helped students learn to be effective with those rhetorical patterns as a basis for writing an essay.

Not all of these forms have a rigid requirement for organizing. However, typically, a comparison-and-contrast paper will either spend one-half of the essay on one side of the issue and then one-half of the essay on the other side of the issue, or it will offer a perhaps more sophisticated back-and-forth approach that goes something like this:

"A" and "B" are being compared and or contrasted. The more sophisticated pattern might be:

Introduction of comparison-and-contrast goal.

A1—First trait explained for A
B1—First trait explained for B
A2—Second trait
B2—Second trait
A3—Third trait
B3—Third trait

Conclusion about the results and significance of analysis.

I repeat that pattern here for convenience, even though it is commonly known, of course, among writing teachers of all levels.

Similarly, even though cause-effect analysis does not travel with a "pat" organization, it would be typical to follow the pattern of:

- Clarification of problem/effect
- List of possible/partial causes
- Analysis of strength or weakness of different causes in relation to effect
- Conclusion about most prominent cause and how to counter (or continue) the effect (depending on whether the effect is a problem to be solved or a positive event that we wish to continue)

Classification and division are nearly always listed together, even though they are two quite different analytical processes. Classification involves taking multiples examples and analyzing which categories they should be assembled into in order to make sense (according to the writer's purposes). The world is full of examples, of course, from the biological categories for different types of animals to the industrial categories for different types of automobiles and so forth.

Division involves just *one* item or outcome and requires the analysis necessary to break the item into its parts or to break the outcome into its process or steps. The anatomy of an animal would be a division analysis, the parts of an automobile engine would be a division analysis, and the steps successful writers usually use to develop an effective essay would be a process analysis—a dividing of the process into its basic steps.

So, although the overall organization of such a paper may still be a bit up in the air, these standard rhetorical-analytical tasks suggest how the main body of the paper might be organized. If you were organizing an essay around a purpose of explaining a usual professional writer's process, you could certainly start with what you assessed to be the most import-

ant step in the process, whether that step came first, last, or somewhere in between. But a more likely analysis, and a more conventional analysis, would organize the essay chronologically, around which steps come first, second, and so forth.

Even a definition essay may be organized an infinite number of ways, including one of the traditional Chinese approaches, which would list the things that this item being defined is *not*, often referred to as definition by negation. However, the traditional Western approach would be to list the term or item being defined and then to give a reason or purpose for defining, or further defining, this item. Then the writer might proceed through an explanatory and abstract clarifying of what the item *is*. Following that might be illustrations or examples that would show what the item is.

It may well be that these common sense—or traditional—patterns of organizing these essays might not occur to the inexperienced student writer, of course, hence the many textbooks dealing with these rhetorical patterns and, also, hence the many technical writing courses of the sort I once taught.

However—and this is an important issue—these rhetorical patterns are often taught as the basic ways to organize an essay, which I do not believe they fundamentally are. They are actually, as I have been suggesting, rhetorical-analytical patterns that represent sophisticated critical-analysis steps that all humans can be expected to encounter or need or, at least, to benefit from being "able" with. These analyses, in real life, might often be engaged in as part of a prewriting analysis of a subject, and the organization of a subsequent essay may not owe much, or anything, to these forms of thinking.

The second issue that makes organizing such a difficult aspect of a writer's craft, I believe, is that it is not at all clear to the inexperienced writer when in the writing process a writer should focus on organization. The "olden days" traditional composition class taught that, once you have a topic, then you first construct an outline, with main points and subpoints, to guide you in writing your essay. As we now know, after much study of professional writers, this preliminary outlining is not the way most writers seem to work.

Many composition students, intuitively aware of the futility of trying to construct a coherent and useful outline first, would often make the outline last, after the essay was completed. This is what many of my friends and I did. Although it made the outline a nonuseful, after-the-event artifact to be constructed as a separate activity, it did ensure that your paper actually matched your outline.

So, if the organizational outline does not necessarily, or even usually, come first, when does the writer address the issue of organization? I would argue that there are two key points at which it is productive, in different ways, to focus on organization. The first point is in the very early stages of

work on a topic. Perhaps the topic has been selected from a list the student has made—whether the list consists of the times of adversity in their lives or whether the list is of different aspects of the Civil War that might be worth writing about.

Having identified a basic topic of this sort, often a student can benefit, probably after a round or two of freewriting, from free-associatively constructing a "web," or a "clustering," of possible different aspects of the topic.

For a personal essay about an adversity-producing life situation, the student might put the name of the basic adversity in a center circle, and then, in circles surrounding that topic, the different parts or steps that the writer might include in the paper. Then these outer circles can be numbered in the likely order they might be talked about in the essay.

With the Civil War topic, let's say the writer chooses to write about the most deadly battle of the war. The name of that battle, and reference to its deadliness (perhaps), is placed in a center circle, and then the unfolding topics to be discussed within the essay are placed in circles around that center circle: perhaps a circle around the deadly statistics; a circle around what key factor made the battle so deadly; a circle around who "won" the battle and how; perhaps a circle around a certain general or a general's tactical maneuver that greatly affected the outcome of the battle; and a circle around the significance of this battle in the overall war. In any case, though I am recommending webbing and clustering here (often two different names for the same thing), I am more especially suggesting that relatively early on is a good time to pause and plan—to initially organize in the sense that you attempt to assemble the parts of your essay. This is as much an estimating activity as it is an organizing activity; the writer is estimating what parts, or subtopics, will earn a place in the essay, and then this, to some degree, guides the writer in deciding what to write about. This is not intended as a rigid organizing guide nor as a final decision about what will be included in the paper.

So, setting up the expectation that the writer will have a go at guessing about topic focus and organization relatively early on is a helpful step. Then helping the writer with webbing—after some freewriting has occurred but before a lot of pages have been developed—can help the writer with organization in the early stages of an essay.

However, a serious overall organization plan must still be developed at some later point. Often, after a first draft has been completed, either an organization pattern will seem to have emerged or the lack of effective organization will seem more apparent. In either case, in the midst of or after this first draft is the time, I believe, to make the firmest attempt to select your overall organization.

What I Say to Students to Guide Organization: What, How, Why

I very well could say portions of the above introduction to students, if the age of the students and our mutual interest in the topic of organization indicated that might be helpful.

However, I would be more likely to make reference to all of the above with a sweeping statement like "There are actually many, many ways to organize a piece of writing, and a lot depends on what type of writing you are trying to do: a memoir, an informative essay, research, a poem. You will be learning many different ways to organize over time, and I encourage you to be open and to try to learn about organizing different types of writing, because that is an important part of being a successful writer." Then, I would speak as I indicate in the next several paragraphs.

I begin: For today, I am going to teach, or help review, two of the most common and best ways to organize an essay. These two organization types are patterns many professional writers use over and over again in order to successfully control the focus and development of their writing.

"The first type of organization, which is common among professional writers and which professional writers find so useful, is to organize the essay in the most common order in which we tell a story, from first to last. Often, as you may know, this is called "chronological order," because it follows how the events happened over time—first, second, third, and so forth.

The second most basic type of organization is one in which the writer, probably after some notebook writing to explore the topic, selects several parts, or several examples, that will best show the point or idea that they are writing about. For example, in my essay, I am arguing or explaining that Mama is an exceptional cat. I then try to provide different types of exceptional behavior and give examples.

If you are writing the first type of organization—chronological order—your story should arrive at a climax, turning point, or main event as your last or next to last example. If you are writing the second type of organization, in which you have a point to make or idea to clarify about your topic, your main example or best example or most important example should also usually be last or next to last in your essay.

So, typically, both of these organizational patterns have this aspect in common: Both of them should arrive at the main event or main example at a point near the end where the climax of a story would occur. The event or example may not be an actual climax, but it should still be located where the climax would be, and—this is an important craft point—this part should be the longest episode or moment in your chronological story,

and in the "explaining your point or idea" organization, this last example should be the longest or most developed example in the essay.

The technique or method that you use to make this near-the-end part the longest and most developed would usually be sensory detail. You provide the most detail about this turning point or main moment of the story, or you provide the most detail about the most important or best example of your "explaining" essay.

I repeat for emphasis: How you organize the piece of writing is one of your main craft steps for establishing with a reader both the focus and goal of your writing. It is in considering organization carefully—usually, after you have developed a rough draft—that you develop a whole picture of what you are trying to accomplish and of how you will accomplish that by how you begin and end with a reader and by how you arrange the pieces in between. It is not a very big problem in your first draft if the parts of your writing are presented out of order or in a bit of a rambling way. That is natural for freewriting and rough drafts. So, it is all the more important as you proceed with your final draft to organize—to arrange and rearrange the parts—so that your writing will be as clear as possible and also have the most powerful impact on your reader.

Then I present this guide sheet, showing two side-by-side diagrams of these two types of organization:

Two Ways to Organize a Paper

1	*2*
Tell It Like a Story	Explain the Parts/Aspects
(Chronological Order)	(Most Interesting/Important/Main Idea …)
--The order events happened …	--What examples will show your idea?
--How it happened	--What parts should you explain?
A) It started out …	A) The first point is, and my example
B) Second, what happened was …	B) One more example of my idea is …
C) Next, what happened was …	C) Another example of my idea is …
D) Main event/climax/turning point	D) The main/best example is …
E) Conclusion	E) Conclusion

*NOTE: As explained above, "D" should almost always be the longest place, the most developed part, of your narrative or essay.

Mentor Text Examples: Dialogic Teaching

As always in our craft lessons with students, we want to provide mentor texts from professional writing as a key part of the lesson. Here are some examples of both types of organization that occur in commonly available texts. I believe that, by the way I describe the texts here, your students will both see more clearly how the two types of organization work and also how the texts are, indeed, examples of these types.

Mentor Texts: Two Ways To Organize A Paper

1) Tell It Like a Story

Thank You, Mr. Falker, by Patricia Polacco

Trisha cannot read, other students make fun of her. Mr. Falker (a new teacher) arrives, ends the bullying, and helps her. Trisha learns to read.

Under the Quilt of Night, by Deborah Hopkinson

African American group runs away from slavery, chased by slave catchers and dogs, crosses river in a boat, are so tired they sleep, find Northern abolitionist white people to help, and finally, arrive at freedom.

2) Explain the Parts (of Your Main Idea or Point)

Up North at the Cabin, by Marsha Wilson Chall

Young girl has adventures at grandparents' cabin: fishing, swimming, sees moose while canoeing, and, best of all, water skiing.

Wild Weather, by Caroline Harris

There are different types of wild weather, including lightning, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, droughts …

I would make sure I possessed these mentor texts, or others that are equally suitable, as examples of both types of organization, and I would walk the students through some of the pages of these texts to show them how each type of organization unfolds. The above mentor texts are children's picture books, although some of them are picture books with a lot of words. As I have said elsewhere, I find picture books especially useful—in this case, for demonstrating the organization of a text—because organization can be unveiled in an easy and interesting demonstration with these books, showing the organization type by turning the pages of the text.

Another useful picture book mentor text is the popular book *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen, which follows chronological order and also offers a good example of special extra-long development of the big moment. An "owl moon" night is occurring, the little girl's father explains to her. The

girl and her father put on their winter clothes to get ready to adventure out into the night of the owl moon. They start their walk. The girl becomes tired and a bit discouraged. Then they hear the owl. Her father calls back to the owl. Then, lo and behold, they see the owl—because of the brightness of the full moon. At this point, we have reached the climax of the story—the sighting of the owl. And the author is careful to make this part more developed. Whereas there has been one page on most of the previous moments, there are now two separate pages (actually four pages, two sets of two pages) on their experience of seeing the owl, with the most spectacular illustrations occurring at this point also. Once this climactic moment has been developed fully, as most skilled authors do, this author moves immediately to the conclusion: The girl and her father are back home, and she is briefly explaining what she *learned* (one of our endings from the endings craft lesson).

Another useful book for demonstrating the second organizational pattern—presenting a main idea and then examples of that idea—is *A Place for Birds*. The premise of the book is that birds are beautiful and valuable creatures who may need our help and support to thrive, or even to survive. The following pages then present different threats to birds: chemicals such as DDT that poisoned eagles, removal of needed habitat, polluting of needed water supply, or even bright city lights that may interfere with migration.

Making the Mentor Text Lesson Dialogic

The way I would offer this lesson is that I would walk through the first two examples, in this case *Thank You, Mr. Falker* as one type and *Up North at the Cabin* as the other type. Then I would make an intuitive decision. If I felt that another teacher-presented example would help, I would also show and tell the organization of *Under the Quilt of Night* and then *Wild Weather*.

However, either after one set of examples or two, I would present new additional mentor texts—such as *Owl Moon* and *A Place for Birds*— to different small groups of students, with the request that they analyze the books to determine what type of organization the author had used. Of course, I would make this a low-stakes, fun activity. It is not important that the students quickly become "right" in their analyses; it is simply that we provide the opportunity for them to seek out and notice the different organizational patterns themselves. I have found students often feel a satisfying "aha" experience when they note the organizational pattern of a book. And I have found students often enjoy a friendly debate about a certain book if they preliminarily disagree.

Where the Calico Cat Comes In

If we were to make use of these patterns to organize the calico cat essay, we might get the two following possibilities:

Two Ways to Organize the Calico Cat Essay

Tell It Like a Story	*Explain the Parts*
A) First time I saw her … a scraggly calico by my neighbor's garage …	A) "Mama" has three exceptional qualities …
B) She ate on our deck, let me pick her up and hold her …	B) Patience—waited on deck for one year to become our cat …
C) I realized one day I didn't want to give her away …	C) Good taste—always chooses the best—food, place in the room, bedtime spot …
D) Most scary time, almost lost her—disappeared for a month, returned starving	D) Mental endurance, telepathy—visited in my dream when lost …
E) Conclusion: What's different between us now that she is my cat	E) What I learned about life from "Mama" is …

There are two things I like about placing these two organizational plans for the calico cat essay side by side. One is that for me, the writer, both plans are appealing as possibilities. So, by imagining these two constructs for the essay, I have created possible useful alternatives. Second, I can see that these two different patterns will probably lead to saying some different things about Mama, the cat, in each essay. So, pausing to reflect on how to organize also signals to me somewhat different purposes (or meanings) that I would be driving at, depending on the organizing choice I make. This highlights for me that I now need to choose, once and for all, so to speak, what I want the calico cat essay to be about.

What I think this calico cat organization example might be able to do for student writers is to suggest that there could be a difference between what your early freewriting focuses on and what your final essay comes to be about. Sometimes, students begin to work on a piece, and they think of the content of their piece as foretold, as if fate has in mind a certain content and treatment of it. Craft issues ought to be places where not only do writers see potential for improving the quality and energy of their writing, but they see that by making certain choices, they take the essay in certain directions. Each craft step is, in a way, a further reflective decision also

about what we are choosing to focus on in the essay. Dialogically, I often ask students to reflect aloud and discuss a bit which organization for the calico cat essay they prefer as possible writers or readers.

Please see the appendix to this chapter for an example web I produced by doing a pause-and-plan for a paper I intended to write on my father. Also, in that appendix, you will see how I could write that "father" paper according to both of the two basic organizational patterns being discussed here.

Student Task: Have a Go—Students Doing

The most likely next step for student writers at this point in the lesson, I think, would be to both look back over the material they have for their piece and perhaps look back at their preliminary webbing exploration to see if their writing or their web suggested or approximated either of these two organizational patterns as the paper currently exists.

If the existing paper, or web, suggests one of the two presented patterns, then the student could broadly outline, in the fashion I did above for my calico cat essay, how that organization might work out for the whole essay. This might necessitate that additional parts of the paper be envisioned in order to flesh out the outline plan for a whole paper based on the freewriting done so far.

If students see an approximation of one pattern in their existing paper, then I may ask that they try, just for creative purposes, to envision their essay being worked out in the other pattern. If the student does not see a pattern in their existing paper, I ask that they simply select one of the two presented here and work out a rough outline map for their possible essay, utilizing that pattern.

The approach to the have a go step for this work on organization may occur in two approximately ten-minute steps—the first in which the students try to make use of the lesson so far to do thinking and writing work each on their own. They attempt to make their final organizational plan. However, after about ten minutes, because this may be challenging work, some students will be experiencing success and others may not feel as successful.

So, the next ten minutes can be spent in pairs or small groups, trying to get successful experimenters connected to those students who feel as if they are struggling. Of course, some who feel successful may, in fact, be off track, and some who feel unsuccessful may, in fact, have already developed a good organization plan. This can easily be allowed for in the small group work. The teacher simply reminds students that those who have a plan might be able to improve their plan with feedback from their small group

and those who feel like they are struggling may already have good parts for a plan.

If the teacher can free herself or himself to work on a plan for an essay they are working on, it can be an asset to the work session—especially if students are overall struggling a bit. This might allow for the teacher to interrupt the group to share her or his rough version of a plan for the paper they are working on. Students can then both comment on the teacher's plan and also make use of that moment to bring up either new insights this gives them for their plan or to ask questions that they have about their planning.

Sharing Out in a Supportive Environment

It is always possible to pause—in either the first or second ten-minute segment I have described—and for the teacher to ask for two or three students to share a plan for their paper that they like and ask for class comments (in the PQS format). Then the teacher can ask for two or three additional students to share the topic of their paper and where they are with their plan—even though they feel like they are struggling to get a plan. Then the class can brainstorm and do a whole-group think-aloud, proposing one or both possibilities for organizing the essays that these students have in mind.

Discourse Review: Restorative Conversations

The process of a student sharing their struggling for a plan can include three quick steps by the writer: 1) stating their topic, 2) sharing some of the existing ingredients of their paper, and 3) briefly explaining what they hope to achieve with readers through their essay. By requesting these ingredients for discussion, the teacher gets beyond the more vague "I don't know what to do" version of the problem to ingredients that others can utilize for brainstorming with the writer. If a student begins, "I don't know what to do," the teacher can gently respond, "Tell us about your topic and the material in your paper so far."

To me, there is a balance the teacher ought to try to achieve in this type of sharing session. If the students have been invited to brainstorm and to do a think-aloud to problem-solve a writing point of one of their peers, then the class brainstorming should be respected, and the teacher's role in that brainstorming is to act as a guide, a summarizer, and a curious facilitator.

On the other hand, once the students have played out their own thinking and discussing of a paper, or of several papers, I do not think the teacher must finish in silence out of respect. I think the teacher can be

a problem-solving group member, too—but that should not occur as an interruption of the student discussion. If the group has finished and the teacher has either a new idea or an additional thought, that certainly could be elaborated on as an additional final point.

Further, perhaps the teacher especially supports the type of work the students were doing at a certain point in their discussion. It can be valuable as positive support, and useful as a learning insight, for the teacher to state what that point was and why the teacher sees that moment, and that type of work, as especially valuable to the class goals and to quality writing.

Common Missteps: Supportive Coaching Moves

Probably the most common obstacle to good planning is not knowing when to do it. As I elaborated above, the old-fashioned approach of making an outline first required meticulous planning for ingredients that the writer had not begun to even construct, an approach unlikely to be successful. By webbing, or mapping, after a bit of freewriting or preliminary drafting, the writer can get her/his bearings before producing an excess of rambling material. Then the writer ought to proceed fluidly in developing a rough draft, being more concerned about including important parts (even if currently out of order) and early craft steps. Once the draft is completed, a second planning moment occurs, making use of the two types of plans proposed in this chapter.

Beyond those errors that can occur by planning at less productive moments, the likely obstacle for students is simply feeling stumped. They have material. They see the mentor text and calico cat examples, but they don't know what to choose. A helpful remedy for this is to place a capable peer with that student or, if possible, put yourself as teacher with that student for a brief conference. In that conference, the capable peer or the teacher actually constructs, preferably right on a separate sheet of paper, how each of the two options might work out.

The student is asked for the three statements, numbered in the "Discourse Review" above. Then the peer or teacher reflects on the ingredients of the paper briefly. Then the peer or teacher attempts to offer two rudimentary outlines, one chronological and one explaining the parts. If offering both does not seem appropriate to the writer's purpose, then a rough version of the one that seems most likely to be useful can be quite sufficient. If, in essence, the peer or teacher actually provides the organization that the writer then utilizes, that is just fine. That is in keeping with my argument that the first step toward an ultimate gradual release is figuratively taking the writer by the hand and walking them through the craft step we are practicing.

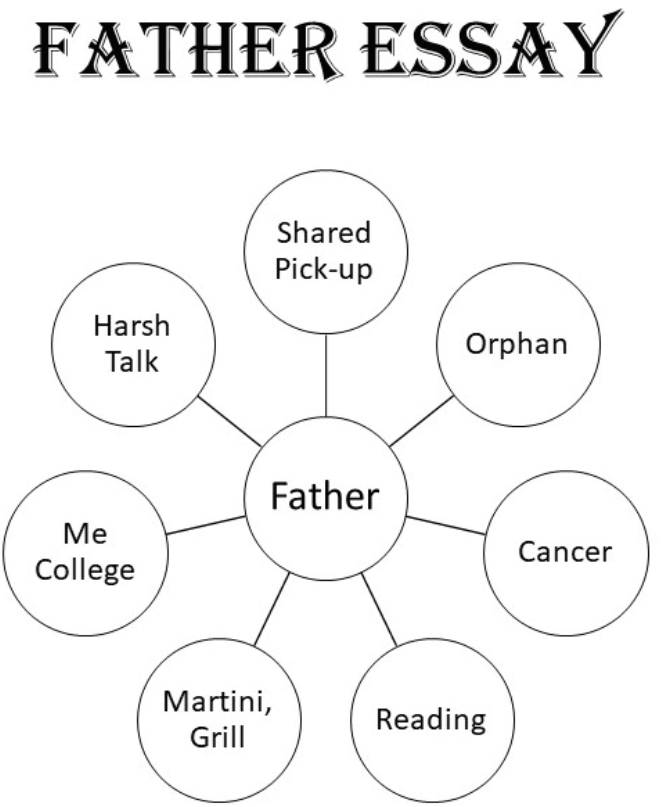
Appendix A

Additional Example of Organization to Share with Students in Follow-Up, or to Share with Teaching Team

Organization Of "Father" Paper: Richard Koch Essay

1) Early On

Pause and Plan: Preliminary Organization—Mapping/Webbing (After Early Freewrites)



2) Later, After Writing Most of a Draft

Two Ways to Organize "Father" Paper: Making a Final Organizing Plan

Tell from Beginning	*Explain Parts*
Leaving for college (key)	Introduction: Three Things About Dad
In his pick-up (flashback)	Reading in his chair
Harsh edge (flashback)	Martini and grill
Cancer (late in life)	In his pick-up (best)
His death	His death
Conclusion	Conclusion

*TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING TIP #5—ACES

WHAT

The Adverse Childhood Experiences Survey (ACES) is something that should probably be addressed in every trauma-informed counseling and educational book. I have included the ACES questionnaire as Appendix B at the end of this book. However, for our purposes here, it is important to note three things. First, as Nadine Burke Harris clarifies in her TED Talk (2015) on the impact of adverse experiences, we are not talking about losing the big game or anxiety about a school test. The adverse experiences we are concerned with include deeper harm such as abuse or neglect, having a parent with mental illness or a substance-abuse problem, experiencing the divorce or death of a loved one, witnessing or being the object of violence or bullying, and that sort of thing.

Second, it is important to know that almost 70 percent of people have experienced at least one of the ten items listed on the survey and that 12.6 percent of adults (about one in eight) have experienced four or more of the events listed on the form. And the initial research using the questionnaire to find this out was delivered to test-takers who were 70 percent Caucasian and 70 percent college-educated. So these experiences are not limited to the poor or marginalized. These are experiences virtually everyone has.

WHY

Third, the consequences of having these adverse experiences are profound for the individual. These experiences can inhibit the function of the frontal lobe of the brain that allows us to make logical decisions and to respond in reasoned ways to situations. And the adverse experiences can enhance the fear centers of the brain so that the individual reacts with fear, or even terror, when there are no stimuli worthy of such reaction. There are also health consequences for individuals, especially for those who have four or more of the experiences in the survey. For example, individuals who have experienced four or more of the events listed on the survey are twelve times more likely to attempt suicide than others.

HOW

What should we do? Fully-equipped schools would have psychological counseling available for individuals and social-work services for families. We should continue to strongly recommend that such services be available to students and to families served by our schools. Also, school organizations or clubs can support students with certain specific emotional needs—LGBTQ students needing support because of the negative or mixed messages society provides them, for example. Further, including families in the activities and decision-making of schools can be powerful, and powerfully healing, of relationships. I know of schools that have programs called "Family Math" or "Family Writing." And I know of schools that consult families about important decisions. Finally, we should help schools, and our school, respond to signs of student trauma restoratively and not punitively. We should provide a caring and kind environment in classrooms and schools. And we should help educators and schools grow toward the time when all teachers are utilizing trauma-informed teaching practices so that students have the opportunity to heal and to learn at the same time. Trauma-informed methods serve the purpose of healing those who have experienced trauma but also provide the best scaffolding for quality learning for all students.

CHAPTER 12

Correctness: We Can't Live without It

Introduction: The True Story of Correctness

Working on correctness in writing class is both easier and harder than it seems. First, easier: Despite the fact that many teachers fear the issue of correctness—or else they have conquered their fear by becoming obsessed with correctness—there are straightforward ways, not hard to implement, that can help students grow steadily in their ability to edit their own work and to be correct when they publish out their writing.

Second, harder: Confusion in the general public about how correctness ought to be taught, however, combined with a double standard in our society about how much correctness ought to be achieved, keeps this issue in limbo in many schools and classrooms and, therefore, makes it harder to deal with than we might expect. Many of the public feel that in school students ought to be regularly hammered with grammar exercises and punctuation-rules worksheets, despite the fact that abundant research clarifies that these steps do not help students to become correct as writers. The "rules drills" simply do not transfer to a student's writing life. Further, the double standard is that despite the fact that few, if any, adults produce perfectly correct copy even most of the time, for some reason we feel that fifth graders, for example, ought to be correct absolutely all of the time.

The theater marquee might say, "Now Shoeing: 'Bell, Book, and Candle,' " instead of "Now Showing," or some similarly error-filled message. We look at it and go on with our lives. But if an elementary child's paper says "here" instead of "hear," we may sputter and fuss significantly.

I promise the student writers I am working with that, at the appropriate time, I will help them to make their piece of writing entirely correct—including helping them make their words into "adult spelling." And I assure them of what I know to be what professional writers do. Professional writers don't worry about correctness much, if at all, until the end, when they are ready to go public, and then they edit as best they can and carefully, often getting the help of a friend—or business associate—who is good at copy editing and making needed corrections. In the real world, no one who is smart about writing tries to make their writing correct all by themselves if the piece of writing is important. They always show it to a friend or helper if possible.

Professional Writers and Correctness: What I Say to Teachers

This has normally been the part of the chapter where I advise how I talk to students about the issue in focus. In this case, however, I am simply talking to you as teachers about approaches to correctness that are research-based,

effective, and in keeping with the positive-response coaching protocol utilized throughout our classroom work.

It is now old hat to teach students about the writing process. However, in spite of the fact that a concept of the process may have been around for a long time, there is still confusion—I wonder if it is in most schools—about how to teach that process to student writers and also confusion about where editing comes in to that process.

Here is my simple concept of the process:

WRITING PROCESS: FIVE STEPS

1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Get Topic (Brainstorm)	Freewrite (and Plan)	Craft (and Develop)	Revise (for Quality)	Correct/(and Publish)Edit

Even though I am not going to reteach the process in full, I will briefly review here in order to establish where editing and correctness fit in the process. We start the process by helping students to get an authentic, engaging topic. *Getting topics* is one of the most important (and underworked) areas in school, I think. Often, students do not get to choose, even within academic parameters, so they then feel disenfranchised at the beginning of a writing task, not to mention that they then may not be engaged actively in the work. Knowing how to help students get useful, meaningful, workable topics is one of the most important steps in the teaching of writing, and a valuable skill for the teacher to have.

In coaching the engaged learner to develop or revise a piece of writing, you will be provided teachable moments that grow from the student's desire to know, whereas, with the unengaged learner, you will see (if you look) that you are mostly talking to yourself.

I have also explained about the *freewriting* and *planning steps*. When students start a piece of writing, having gotten a topic, freewriting is a wonderful first/next step. What I call thinking out loud on paper or just jumping in and telling about your topic are effective ways to connect to the topic more fully and to begin to get material for the paper. When a *craft lesson* has been taught, the have a go step is not exactly a freewriting, but it is an attempt by the student writer to try out the craft step in a free-wheeling, exploratory manner in relation to the topic.

As I explained in the organization chapter, it is quite possible, however, to have students freewrite too many times over a sequence of days, so that they accumulate possibly disparate or unnecessarily repetitious material, which then becomes difficult to organize and focus.

Better than winning the arm wrestling at that late point over topic focus is to *pause and plan* earlier, after a modest amount of freewriting. My recommendation is to use *mapping*, or *webbing*: two different names for what is often the same technique.

The overall proposal of this book, of course, is that a piece of writing can be mostly developed through the application of a *series of craft lessons*. The teacher offers the craft step, provides opportunity to have a go, and then leads students in positive, useful feedback that helps the writers refine and unfold their current writing work with that craft step.

Revision involves working to improve the piece with reference to craft methods, arranging and rearranging the parts to organize, and adding or deleting sections of the paper as needed.

This leads us, then, to the *correctness*, or *editing*, step—the last work before publishing. I consider publishing student work beyond the classroom an essential ingredient to successful revising and editing work with student writers. It is necessary to publish writing if the revising and correcting steps are to make sense to student writers. Truly, I never ask students to work hard through several drafts of a paper, including revising and editing, unless I have in mind that I am helping them toward some level of publishing beyond the classroom. It is impressive to me how almost any level of publishing seems to engage students and to secure their desire to work hard to revise their paper.

However, because I am so often asked in workshop settings what I mean by "publishing beyond the classroom," I include the brief tutorial below. If you already do this to your satisfaction, you probably have your own list of possibilities.

Publishing Beyond the Classroom

Publishing beyond the classroom can be as humble as displaying papers on the bulletin board just outside the classroom, putting the papers together in a class magazine to be placed on a table in the school library, getting the local bank or department store to post the papers in some public area, and/or sending the papers off individually or as a package to some relevant party (even the local school board).

Or it is possible to often repeat, with variations, my favorite: a combination of inviting parents and friends to school at a certain point to hear the students read their papers aloud using a microphone (a good practice for public speaking or presenting in adult life) and then posting the papers somewhere in school, or else sending a magazine collection of the writings home with the parents and other guests. Sometimes, local bookstores

are willing to host afternoon or evening sessions in which this last event occurs: Students read aloud to a gathered audience, and then booklets or magazines of the student work are distributed or displayed for a period of time.

Treats and soft drinks of some type are always recommended. I will never forget the moment on Writing Celebration Day when I was among parents and guests in a first-grade classroom. Upon my arrival, a first-grade girl who knew me from my previous visits to her class walked up to me in her fancy, dress-up long dress, gave me a hug around my knees and hips, then signaled with her finger for me to lean down so I could hear her, at which point she explained to me excitedly, "We're having donuts and Sunny D!"

Correcting (Editing) Effectively: Let Me Count the Ways

Checklists

Most teachers I know who feel confident that they are working on correctness effectively have something like a checklist to help them keep in mind what they are planning to teach about correctness to help students edit the final drafts of their papers just before publication. There are vast numbers of these correctness checklists available in writing workshop guidebooks and from online sites.

Here is my own handmade checklist (probably suitable for K–8), based on a number of those I have seen and worked with, but borrowing most heavily from a classic article on workshops by Evelyn Lerman titled "Creating an Atmosphere of Trust: Grades Seven and Eight," in *Classroom Experience: The Writing Process in Action* (Gordon, 1984):

Correctness and Editing Checklist

Self-Corrected (SC) or Peer-Corrected (PC)

Teacher Review (TR) of Student Success in This Category: Always (A), Usually (U), Sometimes (S), Never (N)

Correctness Competencies: SC PC TR

The Sentence (and Capitalization)

Capital letter at beginning of sentence
Period at end of declarative sentence
Question mark at end of interrogative
Exclamation mark at end of exclamation
Capital letter for proper names
Capitalization of titles

The Sentence, Part 2

Eliminating run-on sentences
Eliminating nonartistic fragments
Eliminating comma splices

Mechanics

Indentation of first word in paragraph
Quotation marks for direct speech
Apostrophe for contractions
Apostrophe for possession
Comma between items in a series
Comma after introductory phrase
Comma before coordinating conjunction in compound sentence

Structure

Subject-verb agreement
Antecedent of pronoun clear

Spelling

Corrects known "no excuse" (previously learned) words as needed in editing
Looks up or gets help to correct other words
Tries new words in writing, even if not correct at first

Using a Checklist

Checklists such as that presented above would have a home in my classroom, but they would also be kept in their place. The checklist would be available for each student—perhaps stapled to the inner back cover of their writing folder. I personally would also have a writing folder that I was using for my writing with the class, and the checklist would also be inside the back cover of my folder. The checklist would be on the wall or taped to the table in our Editing Corner. I would readily provide extra or additional copies to students who wanted to keep one at home in their study area.

The checklist could be available for review after any given writing session. But its use would be promoted only at the editing point in the writing process. Students should not repeatedly flip to the checklist during writing, craft work, have a go sessions, or revisions. Content development and working toward artistic quality are the focus of these earlier stages. Using a

correctness checklist at those points is not only unnecessary (we will soon enough utilize the checklist fully and carefully), but it also interferes with the development of quality thinking and writing.

Correctness Mini Lessons

In addition to constructing a checklist to guide our editing work, I would follow a three-part plan for teaching these checklist correctness areas during a semester or school year. First, for my own use, I would make a list of the ten most important areas of correctness for students in the age group of the class. I might plan to provide only a partial checklist to students—that is, a sheet that includes only the correctness items that I have taught in mini lessons so far. In this case, early in the semester or year, there would be very few items on the checklist, and by the end of the semester or year, there would be a full checklist. Then I would design my workshop lessons so that at each time students as a whole group (or mostly) had completed and revised a draft for a paper, I would then teach one of these editing lessons, utilizing the usual steps of a packed lesson presented in this book:

1. Offer a clear statement of the importance of the rule and (practically speaking) an explanation of how the rule works.
2. Provide several examples from professional texts—the work of professional writers—in which the correctness rule is used correctly. Ask the students to explain what they see in some examples, after the teacher has shown and explained an example or two.
3. Show and explain how I am using this correctness rule or guideline in my own writing by giving examples from the calico cat essay or from some other essay I am working on along with our classroom of writers.
4. Ask the students as individuals to have a go at making corrections according to this one rule. Ask them to make corrections from the first few paragraphs of their piece, then confer with a peer, and then have the pairs present their correcting work and/or their questions in the whole group.
5. Ask the students to attempt to complete the process of correcting their entire final drafts according to this rule taught from today's mini lesson.
6. Finally, ask them to write their student review statement on an "exit slip" to be given to the teacher, stating one of the following and then signing their name:

- I think I can do this well and consistently.
- I think I am doing this correctly sometimes.

- I do not think I can do this well yet.
- I do not understand what this means.

Editing Circles

Editing circles could consist of the same groups as writing circles, with just the function changing. When it is time to focus on correcting the final draft, in this case, the writing circle simply becomes an editing circle. Or the students could regroup into new clusters of about four or five students each for this exclusive purpose at this time. In some ways, I prefer this second alternative, because it prevents a writing circle from becoming confused about its purpose: Its purpose is to provide constructive writing support and feedback to help the student develop and revise their paper, not to focus on correctness.

In either case, the editing circle would now be a group of editors, with the intention of members helping each other to become as correct as possible with this particular piece of writing. I would appoint an executive editor for each group—this would be the student I believe to be the most knowledgeable and thorough about correctness in that group. In forming the editing circles in a class of twenty-five students, for example, I would distribute my five best editors, providing one of them to each editing circle, naming them executive editors.

The functions of the executive editor would be threefold:

a. This person would call the group together and prepare them for the task of editing their papers according to the mini lesson that has been most recently taught.
b. This person would serve as the helper resource for student-group members to bring their papers to for help as each member of the circle attempts to correct their paper according to the one priority rule most recently taught.
c. After the group attempts to correct their papers according to the recent priority rule, this person could reteach one additional rule—a problem rule or an important rule—answer questions about this rule, and then guide the group in correcting their papers for this rule.

The executive editor could also monitor a process in which peers within their circle exchange papers for further correcting, with the peer noting a "PC" ("peer correction") in the places where they recommend a correction step for their colleague's paper. The peer pairs could then report in to the executive editor, seeking clarification for any confusion on certain rules. The executive editor could carry confusion that they cannot clarify to the

teacher—perhaps at that moment or in a meeting of executive editors with the teacher that might occur after each round of editing circle correcting sessions.

This places a lot of responsibility in the hands of the executive editor and must be handled with grace by the teacher. It is not okay for this executive editor to become excessively bossy to their group—this person is a reference point and extra coach but not a final arbiter of correctness. That final arbiter is still the teacher. If two students are about equally capable in the area of correctness, they could be co-executive editors, taking turns alternately playing the role of executive editor. Or else each group (or some groups) could have an assistant executive editor, which would be a student who desires to, at some point in the future, become an executive editor.

Both in a classroom of students and in a professional development situation, I think it is important to differentiate roles that can be volunteered for from roles that the leader or teacher might better establish by appointing qualified individuals. For example, I am suggesting that it is important to appoint the executive editors based on qualifications and performance.

Students who feel they should have a turn at being executive editor can be negotiated with—with the teacher suggesting that if the student demonstrates a clear desire and follows through on that desire to learn the correctness rules and to become a supportive helper of members in their group, they will indeed receive a turn at being executive editor at some point in the future. Of course, common sense must apply here. A student who is among the weakest in the class in correcting their paper probably is not a candidate to get in line to become executive editor. Also, if the teacher promises a certain student that, with work, they might be allowed to become executive editor in their circle for a period of time, the teacher must follow through on this appointment within a reasonable period of time.

The Editing Corner

The best essay in the history of teaching writing workshops that is focused on correctness is, in my opinion, an essay titled "Developing Correctness in Student Writing: Alternatives to the Error-Hunt" by Lois Rosen (*English Journal*, March 1987). Even though there have been myriad books and articles since that time, Rosen's remains far and away the most practical, useful, and effective. Rosen's article takes an activity—correctness—that often seems impoverished of creativity and often seems overly lock-step in its practices and opens up the activity to variety and individuality. I will provide several ideas from this article before closing this chapter.

One of the ideas Rosen presents is to include an editing corner in your classroom. Rosen proposes this, among her recommended techniques:

> Something as simple as an editing corner heaped with handbooks, dictionaries, a thesaurus, can also help students become responsible for their own mechanical/grammatical correctness. The walls around the editing corner can be decorated with a chart on how to proofread, a list of spelling demons, rules of punctuation or capitalization, examples of dialogue punctuated properly. One-page handouts with explanations and examples of common errors and ways to correct them can be filed in this corner along with displays of student writing taken through several drafts, including final proofreading. (67)

I would include such an editing corner in my classroom—or in the computer room, if that is where we do this work. The students could have individual access to this corner to help them proofread their own paper or to study a certain rule or guideline that has become fuzzy to them. During editing circle time, the executive editor or another group member might retrieve some resource from the editing corner to assist in their work of correcting their papers. The teacher should give an occasional mini lesson on the editing corner, clarifying its usefulness in some new way or perhaps explaining a new resource the teacher is adding to the corner and how the students might make use of that resource.

Rosen also offers a range of helpful ways to engage in proofreading.

Proofreading

Rosen advises:

> Show students some methods to improve their own proofreading:
>
> Running a blank sheet of paper slowly down the composition so the writer is forced to read one line at a time
>
> Reading one sentence at a time from the bottom up to take each sentence out of context and thus focus on errors, not meaning
>
> Circling all suspected spelling errors before consulting a dictionary (or spelling guide)
>
> Reading aloud to oneself or a friend, or reading into a tape recorder and playing it back
>
> Listing three of one's most frequent errors at the top of the paper, then reading the paper three times, each time focusing on one of these errors (67)

These proofreading suggestions could be followed after a whole-class mini lesson on a correctness point, or they could be followed in editing circles as they are helpful. Or, for that matter, an individual student who becomes

aware that their paper is now completed and ready for editing might be taught that the first step is to place the three most frequent errors that apply to them at the top of their paper and to engage in an initial correcting session on their own. They would report their results from this independent proofreading, along with their questions, to their teacher afterward.

Lerman clarifies the appropriate classroom stance at this final point, and in doing so, she is also recommending the basic two steps I would recommend: First, the student and the editing circles make all of the corrections that they can, and then, second, the teacher completes the process by making all of the additional corrections, preferably explaining at least the most important additional corrections to the student or class in a follow-up mini lesson. Lerman says:

> By the time the writer has reached the point of publication, most of the syntactic and grammatical problems have been solved through the clarification of meaning. The remaining spelling and minor punctuation problems are corrected in the polishing conference, and now the teacher is merciless. The published piece must be letter perfect. The message to the writer in this process is that meaning, style, and mechanics follow each other in sequence. (94)

Lerman also offers a justification for this editing work that students can readily appreciate:

> I explain the need for this extra effort by pointing out that it is the courteous thing to do in order to free the reader to enjoy the meaning. Poor handwriting, incorrect spelling, faulty mechanics, and crumpled paper detract from the content. The analogy which younger students enjoy is that of eating in the kitchen with the family compared with dining at the Ritz. If you go public you have to scrub your hands harder, comb your hair, change your clothes, sit up straight, and keep your elbows off the table. This makes you appropriate for a public place. So it is with the polished piece. (88–89)

Discourse Review: Restorative Approaches to Editing

In the early stages of their writing, students do not need a judge. They need a positive-oriented coach. The student writer needs a coach who attempts to diagnose what they are doing well—where they are succeeding—and then who proposes a next step toward achieving a quality paper in relation to content and development. There is already plenty of doubt and hesitation, for nearly all people, at the start of the writing process (that is, at the start of writing a new paper). We need something closer to a friend and supporter at this point. And even when we do turn our attention to editing

as the last step, we should incorporate the PQS—reminding the student, "This is what you have achieved, and this is what I think is working in your paper," then adding, "Now, let's fix what needs fixing in terms of correctness."

Once again, Rosen says it well. Under a category she calls "Selectivity," she says:

> Rather than engage in intensive error-correction when responding to student writing, teachers are encouraged by recent writing researchers and theorists to adopt a more moderate approach to error. Research has never been able to show that circling all the errors—the error-hunt approach to marking—makes a significant difference in writing quality; instead it discourages the student whose paper is full of mistakes and focuses students on errors instead of ideas. Students are more likely to grow as writers when the teacher's primary purpose in reading student papers is to respond to content. (67)

So, we are careful to maintain a positive coaching/helping demeanor as the students work on editing. The proper discourse stance is that of a friend skillful in correctness who is willing to help and patient in addressing questions and needs, one at a time.

Common Missteps: Supportive Coaching Moves

Ordinarily at this point, I present errors that students might make with the focus area under consideration. In this case, I want to discuss two common errors that teachers make.

One more time for emphasis, I want to say: The first and most short-circuiting error in a writing workshop that many teachers make is giving themselves permission to mark and/or comment on editing and correctness at earlier stages of the writing process. We should forbid ourselves from commenting on errors at any stage of writing before the fifth and final stage—editing. Prior to that stage, we teachers should limit ourselves to the PQS format for our comments, and we should limit our focus to content, development, and craft revision issues. If you insist on offering corrective comments at the early stages of writing, you will not produce ever more correct student writers. Rather, you will produce writers who withdraw and will not openly try new craft steps—and who prefer not to show you their writing. If you will do as I suggest here, you will find your writers unfolding like blossoming flowers and becoming ever more willing to risk-take in your supportive and healing presence.

The second error that teachers make is to become muddled about who should correct what. Often, teachers are confused about how much of the

correcting the individual student should do on their own. And teachers become confused about the value and appropriateness of peers helping peers in this area. First of all, almost none of us want to be the only and exclusive editor of any important piece of writing we have done. Professional writers seek help with this part. We want our friends or editors to help us. So it should be with student writers also.

When we edit and correct papers in a classroom, it need not be some ultimate test of the student writer. Rather, the moment should be the best—most healing and helpful—learning experience that it can be. So, a good sequence might be—when we get to the editing stage:

1) Student corrects selected errors the teacher has been teaching.
2) An editing circle meets to correct additional errors.
3) The teacher, and teacher adult helper, if available—make all additional corrections and help make sure the paper somehow gets typed up.

Parent helpers can be wonderful for typing student papers. And, of course, as soon as it is age appropriate, students can type their own papers. It can be helpful if students type their papers during school time, while the teacher is present to circulate to help with correctness.

When students repeatedly see that the teacher will make sure, matter-of-factly, that their papers are fully correct and neatly typed in the end (after revising but before the papers go "public"), the students are reassured that they can take risks with topics and craft steps at the early stages of writing.

CHAPTER 13

Argument: The Craft of Writing Persuasion—What Teachers Need to Know

Beyond Fight or Flight (seeking nonviolence)

> By violence I mean *any way we have of violating the identity and integrity of another person*. I find this definition helpful because it reveals the critical connections between violent acts large and small—from dropping bombs on civilians halfway around the world to demeaning a child in a classroom.
>
> **—Parker Palmer**

Three Possibilities for an Argument-Based Calico Cat Essay

1. Mama, the calico cat, is actually among the most special of cats. She is even more special and valuable than people would normally realize.
2. Mama, the calico cat, is a powerful living example of how cats can be more affectionate and people-oriented than non-cat lovers often believe.
3. Or I could use my personal story of my life with Mama, the calico cat, plus a modest amount of research, to gather the ingredients for a letter to an assisted-living complex about why they ought to allow their elderly residents either to bring cats with them or to allow the residents to get a cat after they move in. If I had an aging parent, relative, or friend who wished to move into such a complex but who had a cat they dearly loved, my letter could be an important argument to the policy makers of the assisted-living residence on behalf of that person.

Introduction: The Importance of Argument

Argument is one of the classic forms of speech and writing emphasized in early Greek and Roman literature. So, in terms of importance as a type of human communication, its roots go deep. Further, argument and persuasion can be easily demonstrated to be among the highly important rhetorical forms of our time. The advertising industry is based on persuasion. Political election campaigns are based on persuasion. Further, peaceful argument is among our most prominent alternatives to violence, personal and political.

Persuading your boss that your proposal is the most likely to succeed or that a certain direction is most worth taking can be key components of professional success. Interviewing for a certain work position or offering a new idea to any group are, fundamentally, persuasive in nature.

Even for children, their bedtime, which television show they see, or when they get to have their own cell phone are decisions parents often make partly in response to the child's powers of persuasion.

And, often, as I've suggested above, at some of the most important moments of our lives, persuading another, or a group of others, of something is critical to the prevention of violence, or to the maintenance or establishing of beauty.

Sometimes, schools prefer the term "persuasion" in early elementary and the term "argument" in upper classes. However, academic scholars who have focused their life's work on issues of argument naturally do not wish for the two terms to be lumped together as if they mean exactly the same thing.

Definitions

I suggest that readers make note of differences between the two that emerge below in presenting the work of Aristotle and Stephen Toulmin. Let me also offer at the outset of this work my sense of the differences and relationship between the two. I would say that "persuasion" is the broader term—argument and other methods may be utilized to achieve persuasion. Rewards and threats, begging and haggling, enticing and blackmailing, and so forth all may be used to persuade. These methods can be used in conjunction with, or independent of, argument. Nevertheless, in all of these cases, the goal is to persuade the audience.

"Argument," on the other hand, is the narrower term that refers to parts, steps, and processes of formal argument—persuasion based on reason, evidence, and use of logical analysis. So, argument is a form of speaking and writing (or use of media) achieved through use of historically clarified methods of logical analysis, utilizing evidence-based assertions of the relevance, importance, or rightness of a certain view.

Of course, argument may be seen as the most respectable and reputable *method* for achieving persuasion—and no one constructs an argument unless they wish to persuade (or unless they are being phony in pretending they wish to persuade). It may be that the arguer only wishes to persuade the audience to keep an open mind, but this is still an attempt to persuade.

The Intellectual Content of Persuasion and Argument

Argument and persuasion are not only an important genre of writing but all the more important for citizens of a democracy in this current time. For argument to be successfully addressed requires the teachers, and student writers, to be knowledgeable about a complex intellectual framework. This intellectual framework has not been part of most teachers' "teacher education" and often has not been a part of any substantive professional development.

Because of that, one important purpose of this chapter is to offer a short course on the intellectual content of argument. You could say the goal is to teach what every teacher should know about persuasion and argument. By the end of this chapter, a teacher who entered these pages

not feeling knowledgeable about argument and persuasion should feel ready to enter the educational conversation and, perhaps more importantly, ready to plan lessons on argument and persuasion for students.

The two sources we should draw upon in sorting argument from persuasion, I believe, are Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric* (fourth century BCE) and Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument* (1958). Although both of these texts were written a long time ago ("a long time ago" meaning a couple thousand years in one case and a few decades in the other), the frameworks and terms of both are still in wide usage in general analysis of persuasion and argument today.

Aristotle on Persuasion: Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

Let's say for our purposes here that Aristotle's text is more about persuasion, even though he freely utilized his framework as an approach to making an argument. And let's say that Toulmin's text is more about argument, even though he himself would not, and did not, feel it lowered the quality of his analysis to also refer to the power of an argument to persuade.

Logos, Ethos, and Pathos

The terms from Aristotle's text still in wide use, and still useful to us in teaching persuasion, are logos, ethos, and pathos. As I define these terms below, I will refer to the tools of the "speaker," using that word to refer to both speaker and writer.

Logos

Logos is actually a Greek term with a range of meanings, but in this framework, it refers to the reasoning, or logical, part of the argument. The facts and reasons, information from experts, inductive or deductive logic, critical analysis, comparison-and-contrast thinking—all would fit as elements of the logos part of the argument. All critical analysis steps of argument, including process analysis and cause-effect analysis as well, fit under logos. In other words, most of what we think of today as formal argument is contained in this logos section of Aristotle's framework.

If the speaker/writer tells a story or example, the example might fit into all three of Aristotle's categories. But the story is probably first of all a tangible illustration showing a logical connection between the speaker's point and events in the physical world. Other common types of evidence in logos might include statistics, characterizing historical occurrences and outcomes, specific dates on which something occurred, or tangible and observable consequences of actions.

Ethos

Ethos is the root for our current word "ethics." When we think of ethics in persuasion, we normally think of the ethics of the speaker, the person presenting the argument, the person trying to persuade us of some point. That is relevant here, as ethos refers, in Aristotle's framework, to the credibility of the speaker. There are three aspects of ethos we want to keep in mind. The speaker's credibility depends usually on some blend of all three.

First, the audience wants to know or believe that the speaker knows what she or he is talking about—that *the speaker is well-informed on the subject* and, preferably, that the speaker is an *expert* on the subject. The audience wants to be able to think that the information provided by the speaker is accurate and that the speaker's perspective takes into consideration the necessary nuances of the subject. We are more likely to take medical advice from a doctor than from a person we just met on a street corner, for example. So, a person's professional role or documented experience can be an important part of this speaker credibility.

Second, the audience wants to know or believe that the speaker is *worthy of trust*. This would involve the audience knowing or sensing that the speaker does not wish to do them harm. It would also involve the audience believing the speaker is seeking a fair, humane, ethical outcome for all.

The speaker in a persuasive situation is, of course, trying to persuade the audience that a certain view, or a certain choice, would be best. So, the speaker does not equally represent all perspectives. However, the audience wants, usually, to believe that there is a sense of fairness and respectability in the speaker's intentions.

Third, ethos also refers to the *language and tone the speaker uses in relation to the audience*—to the relationship of speaker to audience. Normally, the audience wishes to feel that the speaker is respectful of them, as well as being respectful of the complexities of the subject. If the audience feels as if they are being talked down to, or if their own experiences are not being respected, that will often negatively affect the speaker's ethos with the audience.

Pathos

Pathos is the root for our current words "pathetic" and "sympathetic," as well as for "empathy." As these words suggest, pathos refers to the *emotional aspects of an argument*. An audience may have any of the full range of emotions as their initial responses to a claim or to a person trying to persuade them of something—anywhere from hate to love, from apathy to passion, The speaker's attempts to arouse the emotions of the audience

on behalf of their persuasion fall under the area of pathos, even though attempts to appeal to pathos (or emotion) may occur in a variety of ways.

The emotions of an audience might be aroused on behalf of an argument through the use of emotionally loaded *language choices*. The emotions may be aroused through "pathetic" or emotion-based *examples*. The emotions may be aroused through an elaborating of *consequences*, whether these be negative consequences if the speaker's argument is not accepted and acted upon or positive consequences if the speaker's argument is accepted and acted upon.

Of course, the negative or positive consequences, in life, of accepting or denying an argument, are also part of the reasoning, or logos, of the argument (as explained above)—because a "consequences" argument involves cause-and-effect analysis. However, to the extent the consequences are presented as appeals to the audience's emotions—or to the audience's level of caring about the argument—they are also appeals through pathos.

Generally, the area of pathos is considered an area of special concern to both speaker and audience. Emotion is such a powerful part of the persuasive process that a speaker may succeed in winning over an audience through pathos alone—by getting the audience to care—even though the speaker may not be trustworthy and the argument may not be fully logical. So, pathos is an area the audience should be especially aware of because the audience can in a sense be fooled into agreeing with a false argument at times through pathos.

On the other hand, a speaker needs to be particularly conscious of the persuasive area of pathos because, even though the speaker may not desire to trick or fool the audience, the speaker needs to keep in mind that, in order for any persuasion to succeed, the audience will need to be reached emotionally, as well as through logic and as well as through trust in the speaker.

Many a logical argument has been well-established in reasoning without arousing an audience to action. Often (maybe always), some level of action is necessary for a persuasion to be successful. Not all arguments are full-fledged calls to action, but it is hard to find an argument or persuasion that does not need the audience to alter its behavior, even if the behavior is intellectual behavior—as in the audience being less resistant to something, more tolerant of something, or more open-minded toward a certain possibility.

Examples, especially, can work for their effectiveness in all three of the conceptual areas. As I pointed out above, examples can be offered as concrete illustrations of the information (or facts)—the area of logos. Or examples can be offered as evidence that the speaker has experienced what

she or he is talking about, that she or he has personal knowledge of the subject—the area of ethos. Or examples can be used to show the audience a life illustration that calls to the audience's heart, that shows them why and how they should care about this issue—the area of pathos. Further, all three of these uses can occur at the same time.

Any of these three areas—logos, ethos, and pathos—can be utilized for just or unjust purposes. They can be used for public good or personal gain. They can be used to reach the audience authentically or to manipulate the audience. So, logos, ethos, and pathos are offered by Aristotle both as legitimate and necessary guidelines for developing a careful and effective persuasion, and as areas for critical analysis by the audience—as "buyer beware" guidelines for the audience to utilize in examining a persuasive attempt that is brought to them.

People not familiar with these terms sometimes have an initial negative response to them, as if their only purpose is to produce manipulation, but, for Aristotle, these terms are simply the conceptual basis we should all make use of if we wish to conduct a fully complete and fully sophisticated persuasive argument—or these are three areas we should consider if we wish to achieve full analysis of a persuasive argument.

The term pathos is particularly subject to being viewed negatively in our time—I think this is because it is the root of "pathetic," and being pathetic is not seen as a positive thing. However, as I have suggested above, in Aristotle's frame, pathos just refers to emotional caring, and we should, I believe, never underestimate the fact that an audience will not be fully persuaded if they don't care.

Toulmin on Argument: Claim, Evidence, and Warrant

Although Stephen Toulmin's central text on formal argument, *The Uses of Argument*, was written in 1958—in other words, quite a long time ago—it is still the central reference point for discussing formal argument in school and in our society today. Toulmin's terms were also those utilized by Common Core in discussing what makes an effective argument.

Claim, Evidence, and Warrant

The three lead terms in Toulmin's framework for formal argument are "claim," "warrant," and "evidence." These terms—especially claim and evidence—are in prominent use today in various settings. Speakers are often asked for evidence to support their point of view in classroom discussions. Lawyers know that their claim must be clear and that their evidence must be both substantive and persuasive in a courtroom.

It is probably safe to say that more people today are acquainted with Toulmin's terms than with Aristotle's. However, most people have not been schooled on the Toulmin framework for utilizing these terms. Nor are most people in our society skilled at moving back and forth between the Aristotelian and Toulmin frameworks—exactly the capacity needed for the most skillful writing of and analyzing of persuasion and argument

Claim

In Toulmin's way of thinking about it, the claim states your position: the point you wish for the audience to accept or agree with. *In your claim, you are taking a position, or stance, in relation to an issue of controversy or potential disagreement*. If you are stating something that everyone, or virtually everyone, already agrees with, it is probably not a claim, because a claim is something that needs to be argued through the offering of evidence and the use of warrants.

So, a claim is a statement that not everyone would initially agree with, even though it may be highly important to the speaker to bring the audience to a point of agreement. Qualitatively, there are good claims—productive claims—and less good claims—less productive ones. This brings up questions of how broad or large a statement can be and still be a productive claim. Some claims can be so broad or so abstract that they cannot be successfully argued in the space the speaker intends to utilize, or they cannot be successfully argued within the amount of time an audience can be expected to provide.

To be narrow enough to be effectively argued, a good claim must state a clear position the speaker holds in relation to an issue or subject, and it inherently makes some appeal to a sense of reasonableness. A claim is something on which you intend to build an argument. So, a good claim, although it will not be something about which everyone already agrees, will be a statement that seems at least somewhat reasonable.

Evidence

The evidence is the *data*, *facts*, or *information* that support your claim. Data, statistics, or examples may be presented as evidence even though not all persons would see immediately how this evidence supports the claim. The warrant is needed in order to guide the audience in how to interpret the data, statistics, and examples.

Further, evidence is not always purely factual. An opinion that the audience accepts as *expert opinion* can be part of the evidence. The speak-

er's *personal experience* can be evidence if the experience is relevant to the claim and if the audience accepts the experience as trustworthy and valid in its representation. Evidence can be brought from *research* the speaker has studied or from research the speaker has conducted.

Warrant

The warrant is the logical bridge the speaker builds to connect the evidence to the claim. Because not all people will draw the same conclusions from the same evidence, reasoning and analysis must be offered that help the audience to see and understand why and how they could or should draw the conclusion that the claim is true. That body of reasoning and analysis is called the warrant.

The warrant interprets the evidence and guides the audience to make use of the evidence to agree with the claim. Many, if not all, of the rhetorical frames we think of as usual guides to critical analytical thinking—comparison and contrast, cause-and-effect analysis, definition, and even classification and division, as well as inductive and deductive logic—can be viewed as tools for developing a strong warrant.

As I have indicated, in the current conversations in society and in education, it is probably more common to think of Aristotle's terms logos, ethos, and pathos as guiding us to a framework for understanding persuasion, whereas Toulmin's language of claim, warrant, and evidence is more customarily thought of as the framework for understanding formal argument.

In the end, it is not possible to think of an argument that is not meant to persuade. And it is rare to find an effort to persuade that does not wish to make some use of the elements of argument. So, argument and persuasion are unavoidably connected and interactive. The more demanding the need to persuade or argue, the more difficult and complex the issues, and the higher the stakes in life, the more we might need both the three-part framework of persuasion that Aristotle provides and also the elements and steps of argument Toulmin describes.

Importance of Topics

Having taken some pains to distinguish between the two, in this practical discussion on generating topics, I am going to use the terms "argument" and "persuasion" interchangeably—recognizing that persuasion may be the central goal of the writer in these cases, keeping in mind Aristotle's terms for developing and analyzing persuasion, and that formal argument will

also likely be needed, keeping in mind Toulmin's terms for developing and analyzing argument.

Finding worthy topics is, of course, always an important part of what makes for a successful writing experience. This is true regardless of the genre of the writing, from poetry to argument. Any time a writer does not know what they are talking about, that writer will look like a bad writer. The uninformed writer does not organize well and does not provide adequate specifics. Plus, their writing often lacks intense or compelling purpose.

For some reason, even though professional writers invariably write about what they know and care about, it is now in vogue in education to think that the appropriate areas to require students to write about are those topics about which students know little and even topics that leave them unengaged. This is what standardized tests do, for example.

The more difficult and complex the genre, perhaps, the more important this issue of topic choice becomes. So, with argument and persuasion, it is important to develop a good repertoire of ways to show students and guide them to the intellectual spaces from which good topics come. In elaborating these areas for topic choice, I also hope to counter what seems to me a widespread myth that argument topics are most commonly highly abstract and often modeled after old-fashioned debate topics. I do not think that is true, or helpful, as a guiding notion. Most potent argument topics are not purely academic or political—for example, "for or against the death penalty" or "for or against banning a certain book." These could be good topics with a sufficient foundation of learning behind them and with student engagement. However, the most useful classroom topics for argument/persuasion are generated much closer to home in the student's life or generated more from ongoing work the student is already intensely engaged with.

What I Say to Students: What, How, Why

My introduction to classroom work with students on argument includes an explanation of the importance of argument as a genre of writing and includes these two clarifications:

We typically make arguments:

- to get what we need or want
- to make the world a better place

I have three basic ways I approach topic choices for argument. All three of these methods work well across age levels of students. The first is to sug-

gest to students that often an argument comes from the writer's sense that something is wrong and should be corrected or made right. I demonstrate this, as well as help students to come up with topics, by working through the following list-making steps. The theme of these lists becomes the writer's sense that "something should be different" from the way it is.

A) "Something Should be Different …" Topics

The student list-making for this experience proceeds as follows:

My instructions: "We're going to make several lists of two or three items each—things that should be different, according to you." 1) "First, what are two or three things that should be different at your house or in your life at home?" (Clearly, there are issues that could come up here that might, at worst, need to be reported to legal authorities, though that is not the direct goal of the question. However, if the revelation of a topic that requires the student be rescued from a threatening life circumstance occurs, then that is a good thing, of course. There are also issues here that are small but possibly annoying to parents if "exposed" by a student paper in school. Nevertheless, I have always been able, usually with ease, to guide students to topics in this area that are heartfelt to them but not embarrassing to parents.)

2) "What are two or three things that should be different about school?"
3) "What are two or three things that should be different about your community, your local area?"
4) "What are two or three things that should be different about our country or nation?" (These could be anything about the way people are treated, customs or laws that might be unfair, usual societal or government practices that should be stopped, or usual practices that should be increased, etc.)
5) "What are two or three things that should be different in the world?"

The students can be helped with interactive explanations as they and the teacher work through these brainstorming lists. Some students may be able to only think of one item, or perhaps no items, under certain categories. But with help from whole-group and peer-to-peer brainstorming, most students will be able to form lists under at least a few of these five categories.

That is sufficient. It is not necessary, for example, that kindergartners or first graders produce items about the world. They will probably have plenty

of topics under "home" and "school." However, it is sometimes surprising that even young children will know something about their community or country either that they are well-informed about or that, through research, they can become sufficiently informed about to write well.

B) "Research as a Basis for Argument" Topics

The second area I have found for rich and worthwhile topics is research. It is, in my experience, quite useful to combine student research and the writing of a research report with a multi-genre project, in which the student not only writes up the researched information in a report (or pamphlet or poster) but also is helped to think up an additional argument piece of writing that could be useful in sharing something important from the research.

In general, a multi-genre project can benefit from the students taking their researched information into a more artistic area, such as poetry or memoir or fiction. However, in this case, where I am concerned to teach argument, I often construct the research project in such a way that two written products will eventually be expected. The first is a research report of whatever sort seems appropriate for the age and situation of the student. The second writing is a persuasive letter that will actually be addressed to, and sent to, a real person or organization.

It would be equally relevant, and more multi-media, to make this second project—still a persuasive one—into a video public service announcement. The PSA has become a common genre in schools that are working on including media in their presentations. Even though PSAs are now all over the place in many schools, I think that this is a good thing, and more PSAs will do no harm. It is a form that mirrors TV ads and TV political videos, as well as TV and internet news. So, for students to learn to produce such pieces, and to learn to be more critically analytical about such pieces, is valuable learning.

I explain to students as I introduce this project that "real researchers" are never studying something through research just so that they can turn a report in to a teacher. Rather, most times, researchers are gathering information on a topic so that they will be in a better position to talk more, or write more, about that topic. Politicians learn about a topic so that they will be able to convince voters that they have a helpful point of view on that topic. Doctors or medical researchers study something so that they will be able to help the government or the public make better medical decisions. Often, the politicians will write up their research in a position paper that will be delivered to newspapers and to voters, somewhat like a letter. Doctors and medical researchers may write an article for a medical

journal or a formal letter advising some authority or group about what should be done in medical practice. In short, as I would say to students, real researchers usually engage in research so that they can talk more powerfully about a certain topic.

I have had great success with the "something should be different" topic generating lists, with various age students—including with teachers in teacher workshop settings. If something needs to be different from the way it is, and if everyone does not already agree that this is so, or if anyone does not already agree about how to make this something different, then we have prime material for a "something should be different" persuasive paper.

I also regularly connect argument to completed research, especially with my research paper task that I do with high school and college students on "Insider/Outsider" and "Ability/Disability," in which the research is on a particular diversity issue or a particular ability/disability issue. I recently completed a research project with second graders in which their teacher and I asked them to research a "person who made a difference." With our help, each student selected a person to study who made an important contribution in helping open up some opportunity for others and who helped others achieve a better quality of life. After completing their research report, they presented it to their classmates, thereby learning about a number of people who made a difference. Then each student was helped to write a letter to persuade some person or group of the importance of what they had learned or to persuade about how the issue they had been studying was still important today. The students chose to study Ruby Bridges, Malala, Princess Diana, Albert Einstein, Lou Gehrig, and others. Their letters argued on behalf of further removal of landmines (Diana), commitment to diversity in schools (Bridges), and belief that even students who might not fit in at school could be brilliant (Einstein).

The third approach I use to come up with potent argument topics is through the use of mentor texts.

C) Mentor Texts as a Source of Topics

We can use mentor texts to demonstrate to students where writers get their topics by sharing professional texts with students and discussing with them what life experience or personal interest might have yielded this topic for the writer.

Previously, I suggested the life map topic-generating activity, in which we can examine our own lives to notice if we have similar topics to what the professional writers have selected for their books. I think this is an

excellent idea as a way to conduct a topic lesson, and once we understand this idea, it may seem "obvious." I have, however, found that many teachers do not make use of this topic-generating approach—generating topics by showing professional texts as mentor examples of topics that may be similar to topics the students could write about.

In this case, I have found professional literary texts—fiction and nonfiction—just as beneficial for generating topics for argument as I found them helpful in generating topics for memoir through the life map activity. I make use of the mentor texts as springboards for student list-making (a list-making similar to the "Something Should Be Different …" process). I will just add a reminder that, especially during a lesson, when students write, I write. So, as you follow along, you can know that I am generating my own list of topics as I try to assist the students in generating their lists.

The number of books that could be used for this activity is, of course, vast. I have selected the four texts below because they can be used to generate a range of topics and also because I can use them here to demonstrate for us teachers how to use texts for this lesson.

Shadow of a Bull, by Maia Wojciechowska

This is an award-winning book from 1964 that takes place in Spain. It tells a timeless story that young people relate to—and that we can relate to, even today. I read the first paragraph aloud:

> When Manolo was nine he became aware of three important facts in his life. First: the older he became the more he looked like his father. Second: he, Manolo Olivar, was a coward. Third: everyone in the town of Archangel expected him to grow up to be a famous bullfighter, like his father.

Sometimes, I read a few more paragraphs, and then I lightly explain, at the risk of spoiling the plot of the book, that many of those around him expect Manolo to become a bullfighter, even though his father was killed fighting bulls. Even though he does not want to be a bullfighter, and even though he *is* afraid, Manolo goes into training to become a bullfighter. However, someone comes along who can show Manolo that it is okay to pursue what he is interested in, and that by pursuing his interests, he does not become a coward.

Then I suggest that inappropriate expectations, or rigid or harsh expectations, can be a big problem in many people's lives, and I invite our writers to make a list of two or three examples of wrong, inappropriate, or too-rigid expectations, either in their own direct experience—expectations imposed on them or expectations they imposed on someone else—or inap-

propriate expectations that they were up close to and able to fully observe in relation to someone else.

Language that often opens up topic ideas for students on this issue is to talk about rules or situations that are unfair or unjust in some way. Most students can relate to this angle on the subject. So, the topic can be from the directly experienced or a closely observed realm of experience. The topics can be from home life, neighborhood experience, or school.

Thank You, Mr. Falker, by Patricia Polacco

A wonderful writer of picture books, Patricia Polacco tells many important stories in her work, none more important than this autobiographical telling of how she herself at first struggled to learn to read but then was helped to succeed by a teacher hero who both protected her from bullying and also took extra time to help her overcome her individual difficulties with reading.

For both younger children and older ones, it is possible to make use of this book just by opening it up to a sequence of pages and telling bits of the story as you show the pages to the group. The cover shows Trisha, confused and struggling over a book. A brightly colored page shows Mr. Falker's arrival in her life as a new teacher. Several pages show the bullying and ridicule she faced from a particular "mean" student. One page shows Mr. Falker relating to her in a kindly way, promising to end the bullying. My favorite page is the next-to-last page, where the night sky is being lit by masses of light particles all around Trisha as she holds a book and delightedly realizes that she can read it.

The topics we could get from this text for our own writing are many; perhaps you've already been thinking of some. When I use this text to generate life map topics for our memoirs, I suggest a good topic to draw from this book is to think of important people who helped us in our lives when we really needed it or when it really made a difference. Telling the story of such a helping relationship can make for a powerful memoir.

For memoir writing, we could also think of times in our lives of great struggle for ourselves or for someone near us, and how the struggle was overcome or how it got worse. We could even ease that topic over into a persuasive piece by arguing how crucial it is to be a person who makes a positive difference in the lives of others.

For our purposes here, however, an important topic we might write about for an argument paper could be the prominent issue of bullying. Bullying and ridicule are featured at several points in the book, and both the harm of the bullying and the high importance of ending the bullying are brought out in the book. I suggest to the class that we each list two or

three experiences of bullying that we have experienced or observed, or that we focus on the issue of wrong treatment of some kind, wrong policies of school, or some other wrong event similar to the bullying Trisha experienced. The argument could be that the bullying, or the wrong-doing, is harmful and should be stopped and prevented somehow, with examples of the wrong and also specific steps or solutions proposed to make the situation better.

We can take note here that Patricia Polacco now also has an additional book illustrating this problem—a book titled *Bully*. *I would define the issue of bullying as primarily an issue of misuse of power*. In some way, the bully has gained enough power to harm the target of the bullying. This power may be simply physical size—being bigger and tougher. The power could come from being in an authoritative role—a position of power (principal of the school, supervisor at work). Or the power could come from a certain kind of access to the target—knowing how to put humiliating material on that person's Facebook page, for example.

Freedom Summer, by Deborah Wiles

This book won both the Ezra Jack Keats Award and the Coretta Scott King Award for children's books. It was published in 2001 and was written about the summer of 1964 in Mississippi, the summer after the Civil Rights Act was passed that legislated that all public facilities needed to be made available to all races of people. The story is fictional, although based on episodes Deborah Wiles closely observed while growing up in the Deep South at that time.

As with *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, the basic story of this book can be easily presented to older but also even very young children by displaying a few of the illustrations and telling moments of the story aloud. The story is of two elementary school age boys, one black and one white, who are best friends, and who have always swum in the creek together. Now, they have heard that the city swimming pool will be open to both of them. But on the day they rush to the pool to experience this, they find that a city work crew is just finishing filling the entire pool with asphalt so that no one can ever again swim in that pool.

After experiencing their anguished disappointment about this, the boys do not let that end their quest to be together. They find shortly that they can both go into the candy store and choose their own piece of candy to buy.

Such sad and racist responses to the Civil Rights Act did occur in various places, and this example represents well, even today, how bigoted and

unfair human treatment of others can sometimes be. I invite the students to list-make with me on two or three topics of an experience of bigotry or unfairness they have lived through or observed, or a public or school policy that seemed to make the situation worse or unfair, or *any bad treatment of someone because they were different*.

The social justice issue of fairness and equal opportunity is somewhat different from bullying, I would argue. *In the case of social justice, as in the mentor text example, someone is treated negatively, prevented from a certain kind of opportunity, or denied fair treatment, specifically because they are "different" in some identifiable way: different in race, religion, gender, ability/disability, sexual orientation, language, age, or other ways*.

A Place For Birds, by Melissa Stewart

This picture book incorporates the work of an acclaimed writer, Melissa Stewart, and an acclaimed illustrator, Higgins Bond. The book initially feels like mostly a book of information about birds, focusing especially on the beauty and value to nature that birds provide. However, it then, even more fully, elaborates the environmental circumstances that birds need if they are to survive. The book specifies habitat or environment needs that birds have—with one or two pages devoted to each of several selected habitat issues. The book takes up issues such as the problem of insecticides harming birds, the problem of oil spills affecting bird survival, the problem of invasive species, the problem of lights in city skyscrapers interfering with bird migration, and other issues.

The glorious illustrations make the point of how beautiful and varied birds are, which makes a reader wish to preserve and protect them. Then the information about how we can help birds survive is so straightforward and clear that it makes readers wish to follow the guidelines that the book recommends. The steps needed to protect birds seem only right and reasonable, supported not only by clear information but also by a matter-of-fact tone.

I invite students to list-make in a few different directions off of the topic of this book. First, I suggest that one of the basic points of this book is that birds are even more beautiful and valuable than many people realize. Usually, nearly all students can be helped to think of at least one thing they know that fits this category for them. I join the students in *listing two or three of the things in my life or experiences that I feel I know to be even more beautiful or more valuable than many people realize*. This is a good topic for an argument paper. The writer is apt to have a passion for the subject and a persuasive "gap" between herself or himself and the reader.

Next, I invite students to *list two or three animals or places they may have experienced in the natural world, or in our environment, that they see being harmed or altered for the worse*. For some, this is a topic they can get into with passion, but, for others, it is not as productive of a topic area because they are not as emotionally connected to nature or do not have information on topics that fit this category. I readily accept that some will have one or more items that they can write well about in this area, whereas others may come up empty. Either is acceptable; we are just brainstorming possible topics.

I suggest that a variation on this topic might be to list changes in their city or town that are made to help "civilization" become easier or better but which, according to them, make things less beautiful or take a valuable component of life away, as some pretend to make things better. These last two topic variations—first, something is more beautiful and valuable than people realize, or second, our natural environment or our city are harmed by a certain change—open up the idea of "stakeholders." A change might serve certain stakeholders well and serve other stakeholders poorly. An additional practice task could be to list aloud and discuss one or more changes made by a person or group—changes that serve some stakeholders well and that serve other stakeholders poorly.

When students are listing topics, it is, I have found, almost always helpful to pause at some point and ask who is having good luck generating likely productive topics. These folks can share aloud some of their topic possibilities. Then, if the classroom environment is comfortable enough, some students will respond when the teacher asks if there are others who are having difficulty getting good topics. When these students share their difficulty, others can explain how they came up with topics that seem workable, or others can join in with a student to brainstorm aloud together some possibilities for that student.

To sum up, my three favorite approaches to help students get topics for persuasive writing and argument are: A) the "something should be different …" paper, B) the "letter after research" report, and C) generating topics from mentor texts. I have had success with all three of these approaches.

Conclusion

Argument is one of the most important genres of writing and speaking. If our country's educational practices did not previously include powerful treatment of this genre, then it is a good thing if we are increasing our emphasis on this important rhetorical purpose. There are probably few critical analytical skills more important within a democracy and within global politics than being able to analyze persuasive efforts directed at us

as audience. And there are few writing and speaking skills more important to the individual's success in life, not to mention success in the public conversation, than being able to craft an effective argument. Thoughtful, nonviolent, but assertive argument is one of the world's most powerful tools for working toward peace.

In educational settings, lack of time can lead to emphasizing certain genres of writing to the diminishment of others. In past years, memoir, or the personal essay, was often emphasized to the exclusion of others. In the era of Common Core, there was a possibility that forms such as argument and persuasion would be emphasized to the diminishment of others.

I suggest that the different forms are complementary to one another. I believe, as I have already argued, that memoir is the most fruitful foundational writing for launching a full and fully effective writing workshop in our classrooms. Memoir often elicits student passion for writing most quickly and easily. Memoir leads to emphasis on the craft of writing effective "scene moments" in developed sensory detail.

Those scene moments from memoir then become excellent models for how to develop a good illustration in a research paper and how to elaborate on an effective example of evidence in the argument. These forms are not as different as sometimes they are represented to be. It is not unusual for the most persuasive writings to be based on the elaborated story or example. A powerful argument relies on generating passion in the writer and reader—the same kind of passion the writer easily learns to feel as the writer of memoir.

The appendices to this chapter, presented at the end of the book, complete the tool kit for teaching that I believe can help the teacher of argument to coach students positively and effectively, so there will be little need to harangue students about "what's missing" in their writing along the way. A key to compassionate pedagogy that also leads to quality is to find effective positive coaching language that helps the students engage with additional critical thought, instead of simply inserting teacher judgment of what's wrong.

Fourth-Grade Learners: What Students Can Do

As I have been working on this argument chapter, I have also been working with a small group of fourth graders on argument writing. Although I often work with whole classrooms of students, the specific setting in this case placed me working with seven volunteer fourth graders in front of a principal and staff of the elementary school, numbering about twenty-eight adults.

I explained to the student group that we were talking about a special type of argument. Sometimes in the world, we use the word "argument" to refer to a moment when people are upset with each other and perhaps raising their voices or even marching out of the room. "In this case today," I said, "we are talking about *making* an argument, not *having* an argument. And we are talking about a more formal and open-minded type of argument in which we are trying to persuade someone to make a change."

I also explained about our working conditions: that they would need to try hard to accomplish the steps and tasks that I proposed. However, I assured them, "When you try hard, then my side of this rule is that I will always be there to help you. You can ask me for help whenever you need it." In the end, I assured them, we would have the goal that professional writers have—of going public with our writing. I mentioned that we would display their work at an upcoming school celebration day for parents and other visitors and that I hoped to utilize their writings as examples to show other schools "what fourth graders can do with argument."

Finally, I explained that we would follow response practices that would help us coach each other to succeed, rather than judge each other, and I assured, "We are going to take good care of each other." We then made use of the PQS protocol in discussing freewrites and drafts as they emerged.

In life, I said, we may need to make an argument for two basic reasons:

- to get something we need or want
- to make the world a better place

I then read them excerpts and walked them quickly through the plots of a number of children's books—exactly as I described in the mentor-text approach earlier in this chapter. Soon, all had personally meaningful topics.

Lana wanted to find a way to help feed hungry children in Africa, inspired by a television infomercial she had seen. Eliot worried about the plight of newly hatched sea turtles hurrying to the sea and wanted to learn more about how to help sea turtles survive. Toni wanted to argue that hunting season should only be one week long to give the animals a better chance to survive. Kevin wanted to clarify for people that his dog, and dogs in general, might be more valuable than people realize. Karen wanted to explain, using her experience with guinea pigs to guide her, that there ought to be a classroom pet. Ellie was ready to dive into a paper that continued

an argument with her parents and that asserted she ought to be allowed to paint and redesign her bedroom. D. J. was haunted by an image of a situation he'd observed—someone's dog on a short chain in the hot sun. He wanted to write about preventing animal abuse.

In that session, before the teachers and staff, I taught the students to ask "what, why, how" questions as a way to get ideas for their reasons and examples:

- Why do you believe what you believe?
- Why is something wrong or right?
- What did you see or hear that made you take the position you have taken?
- What experience could you tell about that would show how you became aware of your point?
- How would things need to change in order to make the situation right?
- What would it look like if people were doing the right thing?

After I asked each of them a few questions of this type, I had them ask each other further questions in pairs. They then did short freewrites to begin to answer one or more of the questions they were asked, after which we briefly shared and noted what we liked or appreciated most from each shared piece. They then worked in their classrooms to develop the content of their arguments more fully.

In one of our sessions recently, we worked on developing the rebuttal part of our argument. Each writer had to think, sometimes with the help of group brainstorming, of what the strongest opposing view to theirs might be. Then each tried to write the clearest statement possible of their reason for believing their own side of the argument, in spite of that opposing view. This was a challenging session. I scaffolded by offering what people sometimes say when asked to help with an improving-the-world project: People might say, "I'm busy," or, "It would be too hard to make a difference." Or, I suggested, sometimes the opposing view is just one of not caring about your topic: "Why (or how) does this matter to me?"

With this help, the students could think of the opposing views, but in most cases, they found the opposing view emotionally objectionable, as if the opposition should not hold that view. Of course, this mirrors a difficulty we adults also have with making our arguments—we are emotionally attached to our side. At least, I reasoned, these students are getting an opportunity to recognize and practice managing these emotions as youngsters. Perhaps our society would be the better

for it if thoughtful work with rebuttals, on arguments important to us, were practiced more often in meaningful school projects.

As I write here, our group is still working on developing an example in some sensory detail (of when something is wrong or what things look like when they are right). Some are also engaging in the additional research needed to add factual information to their pieces. Eliot is trying to find out the exact status of sea turtles with respect to their survival today. Lana is studying what some people are doing to try to fight hunger. Toni is reading about some animal species that have become endangered by hunting. Karen is going to interview her friend who owns a guinea pig about the pros and cons of having one. Karl is writing several scenes that will show how special his dog is—and how special and valuable a dog can be. Ellie has drawn a meticulous design illustration showing what her bedroom would be like if she were given permission to proceed with her remodeling; now she is explaining the benefits of the new design, as well as explaining how much of the work she feels she could and would do herself. D. J. is reading online about what organizations like the ASPCA and Humane Society are doing to help work against animal abuse, so that he can make an informed specific argument about what his readers should do.

Each of them knows that, somewhere near the end of their piece, they will need to put into words for their audience what the first step is that their readers could take to help make the needed or desired change.

These fourth graders are not fundamentally different from other fourth graders, nor are they fundamentally different from most students. If engaged with purposeful writing workshop tasks that offer room for meaningful choice in an environment where emotional safety and ongoing coaching are provided, they thrust themselves industriously into the work. With their personal choice engaging them and a public purpose motivating them, they are also able to sustain their effort to produce writing that can make them and their teacher proud. In the moment, it is rewarding to be proud of their achievement, and in the long run, it is significant that this work helps them practice powerfully for some of the most important life challenges they will face.

*TRAUMA-INFORMED TEACHING TIP #6—WHEN IN DOUBT, ASK THE KIDS

Evelyn Lerman, whose work served as a guide in the chapter on correctness, offers this advice in relation to all classroom management questions: "When in doubt, ask the kids."

I have made steady use of this advice throughout my teaching career. When an assignment or academic task does not work out well, I ask of the students, "What could I have done differently?" Or I ask, "How should I change things with our next step?"

If I am contemplating two different options for our class, I may very well ask, "Which of these two options would you prefer?" If I am attempting to engage students a certain way, but they are not becoming engaged, I may ask, "What do you recommend I do to get our group more engaged?"

I also use this approach when working with individuals. I may ask, "How can I help you get your work done on time?" Or, "What do you think you should do? And what should I do to increase your success in this class?"

Similarly, when dealing with students who have experienced trauma, we do not have to make guesses in the dark about how to help them. We can ask, "What should I do to make sure you feel safe and respected?" Or, "How could we do this work so that it is more fun for you?" Or, "What would it take for this situation to become a learning environment that you feel safe and supported in?"

Or we can ask, "What gives you joy or peace?" Or, "What is beautiful or fun to you?" Or, "What am I doing that is helpful to you?" And, "What else could I do to make the situation even more helpful to you?"

I have found that, often, students know the answers to such questions. And I have found that, sometimes, teachers are not aware how much help they can get by asking such questions. One of Paulo Freire's fundamental principles in his powerful philosophy of education is the principle of sharing the power, sharing the decision-making process, providing choice to students. This works in all phases of school tasks and of learning, but never and nowhere is it more important than when we are working with students who have experienced trauma. These students can be key in helping us problem-solve their pathway back to full healing and learning.

CHAPTER 14

Inquiry: The Craft of Writing the Research Paper

You have to learn to love the corn.

—Barbara McClintock
(Nobel Prize-winning biologist)

Introduction

Stephanie Harvey explains her basic perspective on research in the opening pages of her wonderful book *Nonfiction Matters* (1998):

> Teaching for understanding has become a top priority for me. Students and teachers gain understanding through inquiry. Inquiry projects born of learners' passion and curiosity encourage students to understand what they learn, rather than merely retell it. This understanding leads to insight, which occurs in kindergartners as well as Ph.D. candidates. Insight leads to new questions not possible before. …
>
> Inquiry requires that we dig beneath the surface to explore a topic, dwell in it, wonder about it, and find out information. This deeper understanding is forged with long-term memory. (2)

We all know some things about this—I want to review some of those things we know here and now. We are familiar with several standard, often superficially done, research topics. We all know the "states" project, for example. In fifth grade, my friend Michael and I shared the state of Nebraska. Although we found a very helpful thick blue book about Nebraska in the local library, as well as the encyclopedia entry on it, we never had a single moment in which the state lifted off of the page with interest—nor did we ever generate one single authentic question that we wished to answer about Nebraska. Our teacher, however, did not object to us copying at length directly out of the encyclopedia or other texts, so one modest source of happiness for us was that producing the "report" was simply tedious, not difficult.

Harvey mentions the "states" project as an example of the kind of project that does not initially enlist or generate the learner's passion. As with Michael and me, such projects normally culminate with "reports" that, though they may be enhanced with more interesting illustrations, typically result in superficial information that only allows learners to be what Harvey calls mere "word movers, rearranging information and reporting it back" (3).

We all also know, contrastingly, how genuine inquiry can awaken the whole mind and spirit. We can remember those times, in or out of school, when our earnest, sometimes desperate, desire to know about something important drove us to inquire, search, and dig for meaning—even though we might not have used the educational phrase "critical analysis" to describe it to ourselves.

For a few years in elementary school, I read every dog book I could get my hands on—with fascination, rapt attention, and growing compassion. Later, in college, I think because a certain amount of choice was offered,

I got nearly as involved in my history of Russia seminar research topic on "The Fall of the Kerensky Regime," a study of the brief moment of democracy in Russia between the end of the rule of the czars and the beginning of the Communist dictatorship. More recently, I have been reading voraciously about and practicing selected methods of some of the world's great spiritual traditions—reading and rereading the four Gospels of the Bible for nuances of Jesus's teaching on loving your neighbor, practicing Hindu meditation as a path to peace and potential enlightenment, doing critical thinking about the Buddhist concept of "dependent arising," becoming more aware of Hebrew mysticism from the Kabbalah, and ruminating upon why "giving alms to the poor" is one of the five pillars of Islam.

I would suggest that we will not get true inquiry going in our classrooms without choice. Osho, whose learning ideas serve as a launch for this book, is an Eastern thinker bringing advice on creativity and learning to us Westerners. Osho advises that creativity travels with the "fragrance of freedom." Paulo Freire explains that people who feel they have no power over the situation are not curious. They have no questions.

However, I have found students to be amazingly adaptable on this issue of choice—as long as there *is* choice, and as long as there is a mutually respectful conversation going on in the classroom.

Often, challenging students to "choose"—choose right now, in a sense—is not a way to instill creativity or to cause good choices to be made. They may not know where their best research topics might come from. They need to be taught why people engage in research, how real researchers make good choices of what to study, and so forth.

Further, there are at least three sources of productive choice available to the teacher in planning.

1) Open Choice

First, there is the true unfettered "student choice." Harvey, along with Harvey Daniels, in their more recent book *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles in Action* (2009), describes an early elementary research project generated by the students' question in relation to school lunch: "Where does the garbage go?" The teacher was able to run with this question, even taking the students to a landfill to do direct observation research and to engage in interviews, helping students uncover important ecological questions and ultimately helping them both to report out to their community and also to plan to change several key aspects of school lunch. In this "Where does the garbage go?" project, the students made a group or collaborative topic choice. On a personal level, my choice to research dogs as a young boy reader was also an open choice on my part.

2) Teacher-Generated Project: Persuading Students to Choose to Engage

Second, there is the teacher-generated research project. When you are in the position, either singly or in collaboration with other educators, to select a topic for a class in the school curriculum or to select (or implement) a topic for a unit of study within a particular class, you are engaging in making a proposal to students—a proposal that says, in essence, "This topic is worthy of your study."

I do not think there is anything wrong with this. It is a necessary part of the balance between teacher and student, and a necessary balance between open choice and the existing curriculum. A teacher will not simply wait for student-generated topics. Rather, the teacher will also bring forward things that either students need to know about or, at least, could benefit significantly from knowing about. Or the topic of a certain unit—let's say the Civil War—is simply a part of the school curriculum and must be taught. In these cases, the burden of proof about value rests with the teacher. Starting with persuasion efforts and attempts to engage student interest is paramount.

One of my favorite classes to teach is my college class on the 1950s and 60s civil rights movement. I begin this class by helping us explore the question "Why study the civil rights movement?" And I begin the classwork with a commonly used autobiography in such courses, *Coming of Age in Mississippi* by Anne Moody, a story about a black girl who grows up in the 1950s in Jim Crow-era Mississippi and who, as a young woman, gets involved in assisting with the voting rights campaign in Mississippi.

This book alone often helps mightily to make the connection for my students. If a young person like them went through so much struggle just to achieve personal freedom and power over her own life, they usually want to know how and why such a struggle needed to happen—and whether similar struggles for human dignity are still happening today. And this leads naturally to the question "How can the civil rights movement help us to recognize such wrongs and help us to see our responsibility in righting such wrongs, if and when they exist today?"

3) Choice within Parameters

The third type of choice often occurs within a class or unit of study like those I have been discussing above. This choice, I would call "choice within parameters." We make a mistake if we think all of choice in school or life must be wide open, totally unencumbered choice. Choice within parameters is often meaningful choice, and students are often quick to recognize the meaning available to them in such choices. My study of "The Fall of the Kerensky Regime" was such a choice. The invitation in that seminar

was to pursue a topic of my choice within the framework of the class. What moment in the history of Russia, or what great figure in that history, might I wish to study?

If the students have become engaged with the overall topic, if they have been helped to see some level of meaning or importance in the general topic—through teacher efforts to demonstrate that importance and through an ongoing mutually respectful conversation—then the offer of the opportunity to select a part of the whole topic for study feels meaningful to the student. In my experience, the ability to select a topic within the broader subject for deeper inquiry usually results in a sense of student ownership and in students caring about the quality of the research results.

That said, let me pause for a moment to ask an important question that might help to further contextualize this chapter: "Why do skilled adults engage in research?" I believe there are four broad types of research that most adults have the desire or need to engage in. I use the categories and descriptions below to communicate this point to teachers:

Why Do Skilled Adults Engage in Research?

There are four major reasons why skilled adults do research. Educators who wish to get students actively engaged in their learning and who wish to get students involved in authentic research opportunities must try to help them become researchers for these same four reasons.

1) Love

We buy magazines at the newsstand, go to online websites, ask questions at a party, or hire a "coach" because, over time, we find the topic fascinating.

Hobby: gardening, music, bird watching …
Activity: golf, fitness, quilting …
Place: travel, vacation spot, special place in past …

2) Professional Topics

Boss: Your boss believes you need to learn about something for the benefit of your workplace.
Self: You become interested in something you believe will improve your work performance or that you feel will deepen your knowledge.

3) Personal Need or Goal

Health: You or a loved one encounters a health problem—suddenly, you need to know.

House: Everyone needs to live somewhere. For whatever reason, you (or a friend or family member) are on the move and need a new place to live.
Relationships: You have relationships that are not perfect. People read, seek advice, or get counseling in relation to "success" with others, marriage, child raising, who to invite to the wedding …

4) To Make the World a Better Place

Your heart and passions are captured by a goal in relation to some topic that might help problem-solve for the world, and to achieve your goal, you need to engage in research to know more about what is needed.

Locally: The park can be improved, youth need a place to hang out, etc.
Regionally: You support a political candidate, want laws to change, etc.
Globally: Hunger, poverty, violence, slave trafficking, saving turtles, etc.

In further clarifying this in a teacher workshop, I follow the above explanation with the invitation that each teacher briefly plan out either a research project they are already engaged in or think they would or should engage in. As a modeling demonstration of a personal research-project plan in recent teacher workshop settings, I have offered my own project, as described below. Most other teachers, seeing my plan, are able to utilize my plan as a template for designing their own project.

Planning a Personal Research Project

To Make the World a Better Place

Topic: "Global Warming/Climate Change—Impact—Solutions, Steps"

Questions:

1. What is the state of polar bears today?
2. What are naysayers saying now?
3. What are three worst impacts of global warming?
4. What are the most ambitious and most practical solutions?
5. What are people in different roles saying?

Essential Question (Driving Question):

(not "yes" or "no"; requires interpretation and intuition to answer)

- What is the potential key to turning global warming around, and how do we begin, continue, or build on that key?

Resources:

Polar bear research (Defenders of Wildlife website); David Suzuki's book *The Big Picture*; Andrew Harvey (*The Hope*); differing political views; a business view; a sense of global trouble points; information about energy solutions

Steps:

1. Assemble resources, read, note-take, keep an eye on the news for this issue.
2. Name different parts of the problem.
3. Name and evaluate different solution proposals.
4. Assemble quotes from different views; compare and contrast.
5. Design; include characters who seem real yet who embody the different views.
6. Create/select a crisis moment that brings the debate to a climax.
7. Make the best decision possible about the key solution. Is it just a dream or a near possibility?

Goal or Outcome:

The goal is a fictional story, heavily based on real-life facts and situations, that embodies the crisis within believable circumstances and that manifests both the different views and varied solutions.

Teacher Modeling

I believe that both with writing in general and with researching and inquiry as related to this chapter it is critical to effective modeling that the teacher be engaged in the experience she or he is recommending to students. A teacher must not find herself or himself in front of a group of students saying, in essence, "This writing business is extremely important for you. You will never see me doing it, but it is important for you."

Similarly, when the classroom question arises—explicitly or implied—"So, teacher, what topic or issue are you researching?" the answer must not be, "Oh, not much." In a project-based learning teacher group I have been working with recently, all have been willing to design and enact a personal/professional research project along the lines I have been describing above.

Project-Based Learning

There is a great variety of types of research topics we cover throughout a lifetime, and there is great variety in how that research needs to be

reported out. At work, sometimes a lengthy progress report is required, but other times, the need may just be for a short PowerPoint or other digital representation at the upcoming meeting. In personal life, we may not need to write up a report at all. In the case of a new diagnosis of diabetes for ourselves or a loved one, once relevant additional information has been gathered, perhaps what is needed is relatively informal notes that outline the key aspects and steps of a new life health plan.

Some research projects can be short and their results fact-based. Some research projects are lifelong—such as how we can best meet the needs of our special-needs child.

In school learning, however, I believe we could move forward to effective and powerful research for longer-term projects if we stepped into the world of project-based learning. Projects might include the hatching and releasing of butterflies, while studying all of the steps along the way, or finding out where the school garbage goes, or learning more about one of the "-isms" of bigotry in our society (racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, and prejudice against people because of sexual orientation). In Harvey and Daniels's book *Inquiry Circles*, these types of projects (and many others) are listed and clarified.

What makes such a project a good project or a less meaningful project hinges, I believe, on whether the project includes and is based on an essential question, or driving question. If you go online to the Buck Institute site, you can watch short videos on any number of projects, and the Buck Institute will refer to how each project needs, or at least can greatly benefit from, a driving question.

A project-based study can fit into the school curriculum in a number of ways. First of all, the project can be a few weeks and involve everyone—as the "-isms" project does for the school example in the book *Inquiry Circles*. Or the project can be very long-term—even the whole year—but represent only a small part of the overall classroom curriculum, perhaps occupying significant time blocks at some points and lying dormant at other points. Shorter-term studies can be effective and relevant, as I have indicated above, but even those should involve an in-depth approach.

Essential Questions

The modern tradition of asking essential questions in classrooms can trace its way back to several roots. The Coalition of Essential Schools, a prominent national organization formed and led by Theodore Sizer, made asking essential questions one of its key methods. David Perkins and his colleagues in Project Zero at Harvard also made the asking of essential questions an

important part of their work in trying to arrive at what they called "Teaching for Understanding" (the guiding phrase that Harvey also uses).

In explaining this approach, Perkins writes, "Connections are sought between students' lives and the subject matter, between principles and practices, between the past and the present. Students are asked to think through concepts and situations, rather than memorize and give back on the quiz" (1).

In research and in classroom methods materials, there is much discussion of what exactly essential questions are. An important opening clarification is that not all important questions are essential questions. "What are the key elements of photosynthesis?" may be an important primary question of natural science, but it is not an essential question, because an essential question must function in a certain way.

Attributes of Essential Questions:

- Essential questions reside at the top of Bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1954). They require students to **evaluate** (make a thoughtful choice between options, with the choice based upon clearly stated criteria); to **synthesize** (invent a new or different version); or to **analyze** (develop a thorough and complex understanding through skillful questioning).
- Essential questions spark our curiosity and sense of wonder. They derive from some deep wish to understand something that matters to us.
- Answers to essential questions cannot be found. They must be invented.
- [Essential questions] have no obvious "right" answer: Essential "answers" are not self-evidently true. Even if there are "truths" and essential theories in a discipline, the student comes to know that there are other plausible theses and hypotheses to be considered and sorted through, along with the "sanctioned" views.
- Answering such questions may take a lifetime, and even then, the answers may be only tentative ones.
- Essential questions engage students in kinds of real-life applied-problem-solving suggested by nearly every [progressive educational movement today].

(retrieved online from Technology Connection 1)

Here is a set of what I feel are essential questions for studying the historical black freedom struggle. These questions, I think, would be the necessary backdrop, or context, for a study of the civil rights movement. These are essential questions because: 1) They get at core issues that must

be addressed, 2) They involve both intellectual analysis and moral questioning, and 3) They are questions for which there is no one right answer—a right answer must be invented.

Context-Establishing (Possibly Essential) Questions (on the Black Freedom Struggle)

1. Given the grotesque wrongs of slavery and Jim Crow, what are the possible steps for a society of goodwill (assuming such a society can be achieved) to take to try to right these wrongs?
2. What exactly are we asking of students in these classrooms? Are they simply learners of the subject or recruits in the "movement" for social justice?
3. How can this study be true to its specified subject area and yet also helpful about supporting everyone's ethnicity and everyone's well-being?

Essential Question(s) for Study of the Civil Rights Movement

Why is it important for us to study the civil rights movement?

Related and Supporting Important Questions:

- What lessons can we learn from that movement for today?
- How can we apply what we learn to "difference" issues we face?
- What is the role, if there is a role, for civil disobedience in a democracy?

Coming Up with Essential Questions

For teachers (and students) who are unfamiliar with the task of developing essential questions, I have some advice regarding language choice. In Linda Darling-Hammond's valuable book on project-based learning, *Powerful Learning*, one example project is the study by some elementary students of a historical museum site called Rush Ranch. Rush Ranch was at one time a Native American living area and then later became a practicing horse-and-cattle ranch, later still evolving into a local historical museum on both of those periods of its history.

The essential question utilized by the teacher for the student study was "Why is it important to save Rush Ranch?" Of course, this is not a question that can be answered simply by the facts. The possibility exists that researchers/students could decide that it is not important to save Rush Ranch. And, in any case, after research and critical thinking, an answer must be invented.

Borrowing from both my approach with the black freedom struggle and the educator's approach with Rush Ranch, my practical suggestion is that it is often helpful in developing an essential question to ask, "What is the key to success with or key to problem-solving or to understanding 'X'?" A related approach is simply to ask what is most important to know or do in relation to a certain topic or situation. Alternatively, it can be helpful to seek a moral or ethical dimension to your study: what "should" or "ought" to be done, and why—as in, for example, "What ought we do today as a result of our learning about the civil rights movement?"

When I asked a group of teachers to read this description of essential questions and then to construct an essential question or two to help guide their own personal research project, one of the teachers decided to research "How can we best raise girls successfully in our current society?" Her question was, I think, partly based on a viewing of a Buck Institute project-based-learning video we had watched together that morning in which a group of middle school students engaged in a gender studies project. That project selected the driving question of "How do we act as men and women in our society?" The research exploration especially focused on how societal norms and cultural practices portrayed boys and girls, men and women, in different ways.

I proposed to the teacher in my group that she had indeed come up with an essential question but that limiting it a bit might sharpen it as a question. So, I reproposed to her that she ask, "What are the *keys* to successfully raising girls in our current society?" She and I were both aware that "success" was still to be defined, perhaps as the study unfolded, and we were aware that there was no one right answer to this question. There would be research available, but she might select from that research certain advice or guidance that others might not have selected, and in the end, she would have to "invent" her right answer.

However, the need for further defining key terms and the need to select or shape your own "right" answer in the end are not seen as roadblocks, but rather as likely ingredients of a good guiding essential question.

As I further helped the teachers in our group to grapple with the problem of developing essential questions for their various studies, we often returned to the insight that it might be helpful to incorporate an ethical ingredient in the question: "What *ought* (or *should*) a parent to do to effectively raise girls in our society today?"

Or we further explored how it could be helpful to include a term that elevated the status of the question: "What is *most important* to successfully raising girls in our society today?"

To sum up and review then, in getting started, researchers can sometimes give themselves a leg up into the saddle of an effective essential

question by utilizing terms of ethical obligation such as "ought" or terms establishing the essential nature of something, such as "key" or "most important." What are the "keys" to resolving garbage and landfill problems of our country? Or what "should" members of our society do to take steps toward respecting everyone's ethnicity or culture? Or what is "most important" to do in protecting what is best about our democracy in these times?

Sources for Research

"Real" researchers utilize several different types of resources: books, magazines, and other paper texts, online texts or sites, interviews, and also direct research—that is, experience and/or observation. Books and magazines are, and probably will continue to be, important research resources into the future (though the line between print and electronic will be ever more blurred). The authenticity, credibility, and accuracy of print resources are important issues to teach about with students. About each source we must ask these three questions:

1) Is it authentic (real, honest)?
2) Is it credible (legitimate and expert in its knowledge)?
3) Is it accurate (not only broadly accurate but also precise and nuanced in its understandings)?

However, here, in the ending part of this chapter, I wish to take up issues related to two of the more challenging types of sources: electronic media and the interview. I suggest these are challenging because many educators still feel limited in their ability to assist students with electronic media and because many school research projects neglect to make use of the valuable sources that might be available through interview.

Electronic Media

If we minimize online resources, as some schools still do, because of fears about what the students might encounter (pornography, social deviancy, bigotry, and so forth) or out of fear that the students might goof off (on Facebook, Twitter, or even just by dallying on YouTube), then we are both cutting students off from some of the best and most interesting research sources available and also cutting them off from possible coaching about how to effectively engage with electronic worlds they are immersed in once outside of the classroom.

James Paul Gee reports an overheard comment by a fifth grader, who explained to a friend, "I have to power down when I get to school." We

might well feel that we want to add other important worlds to the student's experience besides, and in addition to, the electronic world. However, I would submit, if we make students feel cut off from the electronic world—as if they need to "power down"—we are both risking their willingness to be engaged and also not actually preparing them for the "real world," which is now, and for the foreseeable future, overwhelmingly stuffed with electronic possibilities. There are foundational teachings that can be offered that can help students become more aware of what makes an effective and trustworthy website or online source.

The Interview

The interview is a time-honored but perhaps not-often-used-in-school research source. It is possible to require students to interview someone on a topic the students are not interested in or on a topic the someone (interviewee) is not well-informed about. Such interviews are doomed to weak results.

It is also wise for teachers to make themselves aware of the journalistic tradition of interviewing. As a small-time journalist for a daily newspaper myself, I have experienced firsthand some of the journalist's realities. The first person you talk to might not be the best person for you to do an extensive interview with. Or the person who might have been the best interview you could imagine might simply be unavailable in the location or time frame you are working with.

Nevertheless, the interview is one of the most authentic and interesting sources of information and perspective that is available to any researcher. An interview with a true expert, in which the researcher asks questions they are passionate to know the answers to, is a powerful—and real-life—research moment.

Here again, sending your students off to engage in interviews without coaching and modeling is foolish and unlikely to produce best results. It is also often not feasible to pause and teach about "the interview" for several weeks in the middle of some curricular unit or in the midst of the student research project.

In my experience, students of younger ages are often the victims of asking what we might call "eccentric questions"—questions like "How long does it take you to get to work?" or "Who is your favorite actor?"

Older students are often the victims of the over-specific question, such as "Why doesn't a certain pharmaceutical company do more to research X?" or "How does a certain machine work, exactly?"

I teach my students to make use of the following framework. It has proven quite workable in producing a serviceable and interesting interview.

First, they determine three to seven questions that they particularly wish to ask the interviewee. I will coach them as they develop these questions and try to help them envision the best possible sequence in which to ask their questions.

Then I suggest they conduct their interview using this pattern of questions:

Interview Guidelines (Steps)

1) "How did you come to know about 'X' [the broad topic being studied or the narrower focus the student knows that the interviewee is aware of]?"
2) "What do you feel it is most important for people to understand or be aware of in relation to 'X'?"

(The student begins with these two framing questions, 1 and 2, and then asks their own selected questions below.)

3) Your question …
4) Your question …
5) Your question …

(And when the interviewee either gives a very brief answer, or just a medium answer, to a question that you are hoping for quite a bit of information about, you ask the follow-up questions:

- "Could you tell me more about that?"
- "How exactly did that work?"
- "Could you please explain that further, because it is important to my research?"

6) Closing question: "What else would you like to say?"

As a journalist, and in my subsequent research interviews, I have found this final question to lead to a treasure trove of information and insight—and it is often a source of the best quotes the interviewee might provide. Once the previous five or seven questions (or more) have stimulated the thinking of the interviewee, and once (we hope) a bit of rapport has been developed between interviewer and interviewee, the interviewee is often primed to offer their best thinking and deepest insights on the topic, but the interviewer must know and remember to ask, "What else would you like to say?"

The interview is a life-long research skill. We seek out experts throughout our lives to talk to them, so that we can learn more about our topic.

Conclusion

I believe there are three ways research can best be made productive in our classrooms. First, students will be much more likely to become actively engaged if we provide and construct topic-choice opportunities—open choice and choice within parameters. The teacher will also need to model, or provide think-alouds, about how she or he would go about selecting a productive topic, either open choice or within parameters.

Further, research can be made productive if the teacher works toward authentic, project-based learning. Such projects can be of varying lengths—one week or six weeks, and beyond. However, the planning of such projects often requires a bit more time and more gathering of materials, and often is best done in collaboration with colleagues. Does this make project-based, or inquiry-based, research sound like a bit more trouble to pull off than simply assigning a research paper? Probably. However, the more trouble it takes is time well-spent, and the results in student engagement at the start—and in the quality of student products in the end—make this approach very much worth the modest amount of extra effort in planning and guidance that the teacher must provide.

Companioning with this issue of authenticity of lifelike projects is the issue of authenticity in terms of sources provided and allowed. This must be a coaching moment with regard to online sources, rather than a time when we prevent students from having access to online sources. Further, this is the time to teach the interview and to co-construct a real-life interview possibility for students—if at all possible.

And finally, research can be made productive by providing real-life audiences for the products that students create. A theme throughout this book is that students write with more interest and commitment when writing for a real audience beyond the classroom. In this case, a pamphlet or report can be generated that simply presents the information the student has learned—to anyone who might be interested or to a certain group. However, with the writing of a persuasive letter or the development of an argument-focused PSA (public service announcement), the student's passion for making a difference in relation to this topic that they have researched can often be fulfilled.

Appendix A

Examples of Projects for Project-Based Learning

From *Comprehension and Collaboration: Inquiry Circles* by Stephanie Harvey and Harvey Daniels:

- Garbage and recycling (primary grades)
- Prejudice and -isms (middle and high school)
- Gun control (intermediate)
- Slavery and child labor (intermediate)
- Bullying (intermediate)

From *Powerful Learning* by Linda Darling-Hammond:

- Rush Ranch historical site, formerly a Native American site, and then formerly a working horse ranch. Essential question: Why is the preservation of Rush Ranch important? (elementary school)
- The short-horned lizard (nature mapping). Essential question: What is important to know about the short-horned lizard?

From *Writing for a Change* (K–12) by Kristina Berdan, et al:

A book committed to students taking social action around issues of school and curriculum, including "Why can't we check out the books we choose from the school library?" and "Why is this historical site important?"

From: *Project-Based Inquiry Science: Living Together* by Janet Klodner, et al:

Water-quality project designed by University of Michigan's Joseph S. Krajcik (upper elementary and middle school): "Water Quality: What's the Big Question? How Does Water Quality Affect the Ecology of a Community?"

Appendix B

Planning a Project-Based Research Unit

(Planning Guide Sheet for Teacher Classroom Use)

1) **Title of Project:**
2) **Questions** (Questions that may come up, that students have brought up, and/or that may be answered during the course of this research):
3) **Essential Question (Driving Question)** (not "yes" or "no"; requires interpretation and intuition to answer):
4) Resources Needed:
   Resources to be gathered by the teacher:
   Resources that a helpful expert might provide:
   Resources to be searched for by the students:
5) **Interview**: Whom might one or more students interview to get answers to questions and/or to get guidance for their research process?
6) **Steps of the Project** (list five to eight steps):

What are two or more *"writing to learn"* activities students might engage in: A) making planning notes, B) listing their questions, C) making close observations of a place, an artifact, or a process, D) notebook reflections of their learnings or thoughts on resources or experiences, and/or E) rough draft for final products?

a) **Goal or outcome of the project**: What *final product(s)* (written, oral, or multimedia) will students produce? What are two or three *criteria for "quality"* in judging these projects/products?
b) **After the project is completed**: What is the most important student learning from this project?

Latino Writing Club—Eduardo's Story

Eduardo sits kitty-corner from me at a small library/media center table. We are eating cafeteria lunch, each having our plastic tray before us with a small salad and some spaghetti on a paper plate. It is almost two months after the last Latino Writing Club Celebration where students read their papers aloud to a group of family and friends at the school. A few weeks ago I had lunch with all of the fifth grade Writing Club members of the school, but this day I have set it up with the principal for just Eduardo and me.

Eduardo is an example of the problem. To the school, he represents a failing Latino student. To me, he represents a student whom the school is failing. Probably more than thirty per cent of the school children of this small city come from Spanish-first homes. This is partly the result of a previous migrant farm worker population that has settled in, partly the result of these folks helping their families and friends move up from Mexico and Texas, and partly the result of pockets of Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking groups who've moved to the area.

In addition to the ELL transition process that teaches English but cannot engender enough academic skill to truly make success likely, there is the fact that Latino elementary students share many of the same at-home problems of other students in the community, such as poverty or divorce.

The emphasis in the school on traditional Europeanized and colonial versions of American history and culture naturally give Latino parents mixed feelings. They want their children to succeed and prosper in this environment, but they don't want them to lose their home language and culture in order to do so. One of the most vivid images in my mind is of the mothers and fathers at our Latino Writing Club celebration nodding vigorously and smiling broadly as I assured them, "Hablamos y escribimos en espanol y en ingles."

It doesn't seem to occur to this school or district that the consistent passivity of the parents may be mostly due to their feeling like disenfranchised members of the community and to their insecurity about their own language difference as well. Instead, the parents are often read as inept academic helpers to their children and as uncaring. The largely Anglo staff and administration at the school is likely to put it that the Latino children "have a lot to overcome."

It does not easily occur to teachers at this school that students who regularly do not understand the assignment, or who do not know how to read the text fully or write answers to the questions at the end of the chapter, may go silent and inactive because it feels too embarrassing to always be the one who needs help. And, it doesn't easily occur as an ongoing insight that students who feel inferior and on the spot often try to save face by acting out. At least that provides an identity different by a few degrees from failure.

Eduardo is a boy I know to be very bright. When I am teaching about metaphors as a craft move in writing, he not only "gets it" and can quickly think of a dozen metaphors, but he is soon co-teaching about it with me to the group. In Writing Club he often has a smile. If I misplace my pen, he looks for it. If I forget a student's name, he whispers it to me.

However, as I've said, Eduardo is considered a problem in the classroom by his teachers, and his academic performance there is weak. I have heard his teachers speak of their active dislike for his behaviors. I have heard it reported that he is often sad, and sometimes crying, at his desk. I can see some of the problems they see. Even in Writing Club he is only sometimes in his seat. He gives the impression of having a lot to do that requires him to be here and there around the room. If I put him too much on the spot he may act out by blurting some smart remark. But, mostly he and I find ourselves on the same side, working toward the same purposes.

Today is another in a series of sessions where I hope to help him move toward similar alliances with his teachers as he has with me. At the previous lunch with the fifth graders from Latino Writing Club I distributed a list of steps toward college that began by urging cooperation with your teacher. That day Eduardo made a smart remark about "cooperation." I then said, with what I hoped was a touch of humor and a touch of sincerity, that he needed "to read the list again."

Today I ask, "How's it going?" hoping to give him lots of room to lead.

"It's going good," he says, with confidence I didn't expect.

"Oh," I say, "what exactly has been happening that makes it good?"

"I've changed my behavior," he says in a matter of fact tone. "I'm cooperating with my teachers and doing what they tell me."

I make a point of not looking surprised. "How long have you been doing this?" I ask.

"Well," he says, "one of my teachers congratulated me for behaving for the past two weeks, but I don't think it's been that long."

I confirm how much better for him that positive behavior is and remind him of how important it is if he and I are to get him to the goal of becoming a college student one day. He nods as if he understands.

I ask him if he does his homework. "Not usually," he answers. We explore how his older sister might be able to help him with that.

I ask him about what he reads, and he reveals that he'd like to read *Harry Potter*, but he's afraid of how long it is. I ask him if he knows where the Harry Potter books are in this library, and he points halfway across the room to them on a middle shelf.

I have him go get one and read the first page to me. He reads it almost smoothly. I stop him and ask him to explain what he just read. He does so clearly and relatively easily.

I say to him, "I think you're ready for Harry Potter," and I promise to send him the first book in the series as a gift early in the summer, so it can be part of his vacation reading.

As we are leaving the library with our trays we meet one of Eduardo's teachers. She has overheard me say the word "college." She joins in.

"Are you talking about college? I think Eduardo should go to college. I think he can do it." Then she looks him in the eye and tells him, "You know I wrote a different kind of report about you for the end of the year because of how well you're doing lately."

I realize that the three of us are having this little five-minute celebration of Eduardo. I realize that, for the first time, I feel that Eduardo may be going to succeed in school.

As I walk out into the early June sunshine, I know that the big problem is how to bring this marriage of purposes between teacher and student about on a broader scale, how to make this the usual story rather than an exceptional triumph. I know that Latino Writing Club is just a casita for a few students, but I want to sift it for whatever larger insights it might have to offer—to try to shine a light from this work onto factors that can help guide others toward how to build hospitable haciendas for ELL students in their school communities.

CHAPTER 15

Conclusion—Compassion Leads to Creativity, Creativity Leads to Quality

Each person comes into the world with a specific destiny—he has something to fulfill, some message has to be delivered, some work has to be completed. You are not here accidentally—you are here meaningfully. The whole intends to do something through you.

—Osho

But one of the guiding principles has to be that we cannot lead a struggle that involves masses of people without identifying with the people and without getting people to understand what their potentials are, what their strengths are.

—Ella Baker (from Payne and Strickland)

A Return to Osho's Core Values

I began this book with Osho's warning that "Humanity is now at a crossroads" and with his ideas about creativity. It turns out that Osho, an Eastern mystic, and Matthew Fox, an important Western spiritual thinker, essentially agree. Osho explains "We have exhausted" the "one-dimensional man." Fox explains with regard to our planet that we have reached a crisis in sustainability (2002, 1).

Most serious scientists and philosophers agree on both points. We have to change the ways we think and problem-solve because those have led us to the brink—if not the midst— of disaster. We have to change the way we treat the planet, or it will no longer provide us an environment we can survive in.

Osho explains, at the beginning of *Creativity: Unleashing the Forces Within*, "You have to be as meditative as a Buddha, as loving as a Krishna, as creative as Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci. You have to be all three together, simultaneously." He admits, "I am giving you the greatest challenge ever given, the hardest task to be fulfilled."

Osho links consciousness (what we refer to in education as critical thinking) and compassion and creativity, suggesting that all three are needed and that each thrives when nested with the other two. This implies, I would suggest, that if we want to change how we problem-solve and change how we treat the planet, we must also—and maybe first—change how we treat one another.

As with the wisest of spiritual guides, in describing our great challenge Osho also provides an accompanying core understanding that can help us to proceed. He adds:

> Let it be understood as deeply as possible: only ill people are destructive. The people who are healthy are creative. Creativity is a fragrance of real health. When a person is really healthy and whole, creativity comes naturally to him, the urge to create arises. (1)

Creativity is urgently called for if we wish to nourish a Great Birth of light, health, and hope in the face of the Great Death we have brought on with our greed, hate-think, and earth-suffocating behaviors (Harvey, 2009). It is an irony of our educational theory that we have thought we had to choose between teaching skills on the one hand and cultivating creativity on the other. In fact, once engagement and creativity are aroused, we then have a climate in which the learning of craft and skills makes sense, and we have

students primed for real-world application that makes learning meaningful. Superficially memorized facts and lockstep practice of skills does not produce permanent or applied learning.

Creativity: Our Goal and Guide

It is important to keep in mind as we talk about creativity here that we are talking about something entirely different than what that word has normally meant in school. We are not talking about brainstorming or about freewheeling approaches to tasks. We are talking about seeking a deep connection between learning and service, a deep connection between setting a goal and pulling from our deepest reservoirs of ability to achieve that goal, and we are talking about connecting ourselves to spirit.

In his book *Creativity*, Fox was clear that he meant neither something ethereal nor something frivolous by his use of the word. Just the opposite, he argued: "I do not know of any area of human potential more important [than creativity] if we are to be a sustainable species again" (1).

In *The Courage to Create*, Rollo May discusses the central value of creativity and also describes the type of courage we need in hard times such as these: "This courage will not be the opposite of despair." Rather, May argues, "[C]ourage is not the absence of despair; it is, rather, the capacity to move ahead in spite of despair" (3).

It is also important that creativity and kindness are linked. Fox quotes Hildegard of Bingen, who elaborates, "I am, of course, the lyre and harp of God's kindness" (57). And Fox concludes, "We need new models of education, forms of education in which the words 'soul' and 'imagination' are not banished but are honored and deepened and acted upon" (61).

Past president of the American Educational Research Association Elliot Eisner has written a book, *The Kind of Schools We Need* (1998), which supports much of what Osho and Fox propose. Eisner's concern is that current schooling, and government guidelines we have set for schooling, do not support the best ideas for teaching and learning that we know.

Along with many of us, he points out a key failing of a standardized-test-based approach to education. We have pretended that achievement on standardized tests equals educational success when, in fact, achievement on such tests merely predicts performance on additional standardized tests. It has little to do with life performance and in fact leads to stifling approaches to education in the name of preparing for tests. We need, instead, to grow learners who are good at life and who are eager to continue learning (169).

I agree with Eisner that engagement of student interest and energy can be the wind in the sails of learning. I believe the rudder of the ship

of learning—that can guide students toward meaningful, kind, compassionate lives and lives that serve—can be provided by workshop-based teaching. And, for all students to be nourished in this workshop, it must occur in a restorative environment that makes use of healing practices and productive feedback.

Healing Trauma: What We Can Do

We can increase our success teaching students who are growing up in this age of stress and trauma if we carry an awareness of what may be their additional learning issues. Students who respond to demanding classroom circumstances with anger and hostility. Students who avoid school responsibilities with a skill and dexterity we wish they would apply to learning. Students who sit passively, resisting pressures to step forward into the work. Again, these are troublesome behaviors all teachers have experienced. The new question and opportunity comes from our asking how we can treat these behaviors restoratively, as opposed to punitively.

The trauma responses of fight, flight, or freeze that our students often display appear to be misplaced anger, self-destructive avoidance behaviors, and passive-aggressive resistance—and on the surface, they are. However, trauma-informed research clarifies that under these surface manifestations lies fear, planted in the learner by previous trauma. If teachers respond with punishment or neglect, that fear grows. If we are able to engage interest, coach supportively, and manifest an underlayer of kindness and compassion in our classroom community, we begin to heal the trauma.

We must understand that "[E]ducational practices should be gauged not only by the skills and knowledge they impart for present use but also by what they do to children's beliefs about their capabilities, which affects how they approach the future" (Boykin and Noguera, along with Bandura, 2011, 52).

One of the critical successes of a trauma-informed writing workshop is that, carried out with skill and care, it is a method that builds both engagement and the student's sense of self-efficacy—it can restore and grow both the desire and capacity to learn.

Balancing Heartbreak and Restoration

I want to offer guidance here for teachers about how we can take care of ourselves as we give energy to our students and to our teaching. There is a basic spiritual balance that can guide us as individuals in relation to work with creativity and compassion in the classroom. That central balance is

between heartbreak and restoration. Fox believes this balance begins by being willing to let your heart be broken. I say in my workshops with teachers, "Right now, something wants to break your heart. Let it."

This is different from letting people be mean to us; that is something to oppose and avoid. But life brings heartbreak. Grateful as I am for all honest law enforcement people—and I believe this is most of them— who truly desire to serve and protect, right now my heart breaks for the African American boys and girls being needlessly shot in our streets, and for their mothers and fathers, who cannot feel sure their children will return at the end of the day. And my heart breaks for children I know whose best meal of the day is school lunch. And my heart breaks for the homeless veteran I know who sits daily on a sidewalk near campus. My heart also breaks for the animal species being driven to extinction by climate change, loss of habitat, and trophy hunters. I know your heart breaks for many of these same things and for other things as well.

Fox explains that it is out of our broken heart that we can see what we are meant to see, what we need to see in order to help at our best. Our brokenness awakens us to conditions and to persons that we had not seen in the same way before (56–57). However, someone who allows their heart to be broken must also strive along the way to restore their spirit. This is why I believe we should imagine a balance between heartbreak on the one hand and restorative practices on the other.

Restorative *experiences* are any occurrence of joy, peace, kindness, or beauty. Restorative *practices* are those through which we seek these experiences for ourselves or in which we construct opportunities for others, such as students, to encounter those experiences. Each of us knows a good deal about what brings us joy, where we might find peace or beauty, and which next choice we make is most likely the kind choice. Fox urges us to provide ourselves those experiences of joy, peace, and beauty—seek them out, savor them. We should do so without guilt, for it is these moments that restore the strength of our hearts and allow us to enter the world of heartbreak productively once again.

One of the wonders of restorative experiences is that they work effectively to help heal the individual and nourish their capacities, whether the restorative experiences are received by the person or enacted by the person on behalf of others. It may be true, as the common saying goes, that it is better to give than to receive, but we must also know that sometimes we need to be the receiver. Engaging in an act of kindness toward others both delivers a flow of kindness into the world that radiates and ripples out farther than we often realize, and it grows the soul of the giver as rain grows a flower. However, receiving an act of kindness, especially if sorely needed by

the receiving person, is also powerful and even transformative. So, giving or receiving kindness have similar effects. Both are healing to the individual, both reveal a model of kind behavior, and both teach the individual the value of kindness.

Yes, the world is catastrophically broken all around us. And yet experiencing the heartbreak in this can awaken us constructively to what must be done. Even the spiritual mystics sometimes have difficulty believing they are worthy for this task, as Macrina Wiederkehr testified by calling out, "O God help me to believe the truth about myself no matter how beautiful it is" (Dougherty, 2009, 36).

If we keep the balance of heartbreak and restoration in mind, it can help us realize three things relevant to the classroom:

1) Our own best work occurs when we let ourselves flow back and forth between heartbreak and restoration.
2) Students' best work occurs when we involve them in such important learning that they get to express their love for others—and they, too, flow back and forth between heartbreak and restoration.
3) Students, regardless of their age, come to us having had their hearts broken by life, and so an important part of our teaching practice occurs when we involve them in restorative experiences.

Whether or not our students become compassionate adults depends, as much as anything, on whether we treat them compassionately while they are on their journey with us. The methods of this book are as practical and skill-producing as could possibly be in relation to writing. However, these methods also are built upon writing opportunities that engage student energy and thoughtfulness, encouraging their creativity. And these methods incorporate the restorative classroom culture and the healing coaching that nourish and provide safety.

It is essential that we cultivate compassionate relationships in our classrooms. Teachers must model both good writing practices and also how people ought to be treated if we seek to create a capable and kind world. Our students must come to understand the nuances of need in the lives around them, and they must learn to be the beauty they are called to create in the world. If this sometimes seems like a daunting mission, it may be hopeful for us educators to know that the more we actively love someone the more complicated and beautiful they become.

Appendix A

Tool Kits for Teaching Argument—Managing Writers Toward Success

Guiding Material to Be Shared with Students:
Tool Kit, Item 1
Guidesheets on Argument Terms
for Elementary and Upper Level Students
Practical Guide Sheet #1 (to be presented in mini lessons)

Argument for Primary Grades: Terms and Definitions

Here are the ways I speak to K–2 level students when giving preliminary lessons about argument. These are also the two phases of the teaching of argument concepts I would recommend with primary grade students.

Phase One Lessons:

Claim:

The idea you want others to agree with. The point you are trying to make. Your best statement of what needs to be changed because it is wrong or harmful.

Reasons:

You explain *how* something is wrong. You explain *how* the change you want would be better.

Or, you explain *why* you want this change, *why* things are wrong now ("because …").

You explain *why* things would better if changed to the way you want ("because …").

Examples:

You must give examples of what you mean. An example is a story of something that happened or that could happen.

Some examples will show a story or picture of what is *wrong*.

Other examples show a story or picture of how things would be *better* if changes were made.

Good stories/examples usually have sensory detail to make the audience feel as if they are experiencing the story.

Phase Two Lessons (for later in the unit or later in the year):

Examples (more about):

Examples may be relevant or not. *Relevant* examples are *connected* to your point in *important* ways.

Examples may be sufficient or not. When your reasons and examples are *sufficient*, your audience feels they have read or heard *enough* to agree with your claim.

Rebuttal:

You should say as clearly and fairly as possible the strongest point or example of those who oppose your idea. Then you say, "Even so …" and give your reason for still wanting change. Your "even so" statement is called your rebuttal.

Practical Guide Sheet #2 (presented in several mini lessons)
Argument for Upper Grade Students: Toulmin Explained

(Clarifying terms from *The Uses of Argument* by Stephen Toulmin)

(For students of upper grades, middle school, and high school, I would give the fuller treatment below. Of course, for upper elementary, a hybrid approach between the primary grades approach and this higher grades approach might be most useful.)

An argument is not supposed to be a situation where people shout at each other to get out their points of view. Instead, an argument, as great thinkers throughout time have viewed it, is a careful series of statements that make clear a certain view and also attempt to persuade others that this view is the right view—the view that should be followed by an individual or group.

An argument becomes needed when two people or two sides do not agree on something. And an argument becomes needed when something at home, school, or in the world should be different from the way it is, but not everyone involved agrees about the possible need for this to be different from the way it is.

According to Stephen Toulmin, an expert on how to make a good argument, a careful and effective argument should have all of the following parts:

1) **Claim:** A *statement* that is as clear and specific as it can be about *what should be different* from the way it is. What is the change you are calling for? What do you wish would happen?
2) **Reasons:** *Why* do you think your idea is a good idea? *Why* do you think something is wrong with the way things are? *How* do things work out "wrong" by the way things are now? *How* might someone, or people, begin to make the change you wish for? Strong reasons (good reasons) bring out important points. Weaker (not-so-good) reasons focus on smaller, less important points.
3) **Facts or Information**: You need to give facts—*specific things* that actually have happened or *observations* of a good or bad situation (not opinion). You can also present how an expert you have read or heard about observes the situation you are presenting. You will need to explain how your reasons are supported by (relate to) your facts.
4) **Examples:** An example is a story of something that has happened, or could happen, that shows what is wrong or that shows what life would look like if things were right. A good story and a good example usually have some *sensory details* in them because details allow a reader to "experience" the story through their senses, and this can make the audience feel that you are right.

   Both *facts* and *examples* can be *relevant* (they really matter) or not relevant. Also, facts and examples can be sufficient or insufficient to make your point powerfully. You need to give enough careful facts and examples so that people can see what is important about what you are talking about.

   (**Note**: Toulmin also called 2, 3, and 4 above "grounds" for the argument in much of his work. He also called those three areas "evidence" or sometimes referred to them as "data.")
5) **Rebuttal:** A good argument includes you giving a fair statement of what is the best point, best reason, or best example of the people who do not agree with your claim. What is their best reason or example for their side of the argument? Put this into words as politely as you can. Then, you say something like "Even so …" or "In spite of this good point … I still believe in my claim because …" (When you give your "even so" statement in response to their best point, this statement of yours is called your rebuttal.)
6) **Conclusion:** It is important that you say near the end what exactly you hope people will believe or do when they finish reading or hearing your argument. Once they are finished hearing or reading what you have to say, what should they think or feel or do to show they agree with you?

People are more likely to be convinced that you are right and that your idea is a good idea if you *end* with a clear *recommendation* of what people should do next in order to improve or change the thing that you believe needs to be different.

Tool Kit, Item 2
Practical Guide Sheet

Persuasive Writing—Audience Analysis Jottings

Students write brief analytical thoughts and possibilities on each of the following questions in relation to the argument piece they have chosen to write:

1) What does your selected audience probably feel or think about your topic before hearing from you?
2) What can you say or include at the start of your paper/letter to counteract their negative feelings or to note and build on their positive feelings?
3) What is the strongest argument or evidence *against* what you are arguing for?
4) What do you need to say to acknowledge that and then to either take an approach that says, "But that is not quite right," or an approach that says, "Despite that, it is important that we …"?
5) What is your best example/story that you can tell that will show what you mean and why/how your point is important? What details do you need to include in this story?
6) What can you say that would serve as the "warrant" for your argument. In other words, what explanation can you give that will clarify for your reader how your evidence and/or story show or mean what you say they show or mean? What interpreting of your story, or background for your story, do you need to provide?
7) What exactly do you want your reader/audience to think, feel, or do when they finish reading your persuasive piece?
8) What would be the first step your reader could take to get them going on the right track?
9) What will be the benefits—and to whom—if people agree with your point and respond?
10) What do you want to be sure to remember to include before you are finished with the paper/letter?

Ordinarily, after completing some freewriting exploration and then completing these audience analysis jottings, the writers are ready to make

an organizational plan for their piece. At that point, once they have a basic plan, I urge writers to "write the part that wants to be written," by which I mean they could or should write the parts that seem clearest and most vivid to them as writers, rather than writing the parts in order. I have found that if writers write the parts from their plan that they feel most ready to write, often the other sections of the plan become clearer as they develop more of the material of the paper.

Once the writers have gathered topics and studied professional examples of argument writing, and before they are far along with their own piece of writing, I would present the following calico cat part of the lesson.

Where the Calico Cat Comes In

This genre, when applied to possible calico cat writings, creates some interesting possibilities for teaching. One thing I teach at this moment is that most, if not all, topics can result in various genres of writing. If you love a certain animal, for example, like the calico cat, you could write a cat poem, or you could write an essay about either this cat or cats in general. You could use your interest as a springboard from which to do more research—about calico cats, or the history of cats, or something else. You could use the real-life character of your cat as a basis for writing a fantasy or tall story with a cat as the main character.

Or, as we are focusing on here, you could take the cat as your topic and decide to write a persuasive essay.

Three Possibilities for an Argument-Based Calico Cat Essay:

1) Mama, the calico cat, is actually among the most special of cats. She is even more special and valuable than people would normally realize.
2) Mama, the calico cat, is a powerful living example of how cats can be more affectionate and people-oriented than non-cat lovers often believe.
3) I could use my personal story of my life with Mama, the cat, plus a modest amount of research to gather the ingredients for a letter to an assisted living complex about why they ought to either allow their elderly residents to bring cats with them or allow the residents to get a cat after they move in. If I had an aging parent, relative, or friend who wished to move into such a complex but who had a cat they dearly loved, my letter could be an important argument to the policy makers of the assisted living residence on behalf of that person.

Tool Kit Item 3
Practical Guide Sheet
Language (or Word Choice) Issues Related to Argument

(Style and tone are important issues in persuasive writing, just as they are with other genres. However, your influence on an audience with your ideas, or lack of influence, may be even more tied to tone than young writers often realize. I have characterized two key aspects of language choice below.)

1) Superlative, Honorific, or Pejorative

Word choice can occur in any of three categories on a spectrum from positive to negative in its meaning or implications.

Superlative: Words that declare or imply something is the *best*—most successful, most beautiful, most valuable—words like essential, crucial, indispensable, and perfect, for example.
Honorific: Words that declare or imply *positive* value to the topic or person being discussed.
Pejorative: Words that declare or imply a *negative* value or result to the topic or person being discussed.
Example: We could say of a person who takes great trouble to be organized that this person is well-prepared or thorough (honorific). Or we could say that this person is obsessive or fussy (pejorative). Same person, same actions, but our slant or stance is different.

2) Tough, Sweet, and Stuffy

Walker Gibson, source for the above language distinctions, and one of the best writers on "tone" as part of the style or voice in writing, has written a book titled *Tough, Sweet, and Stuffy*. He argues that for writers or speakers to be effective with all topics in all settings, they will need to be able to adjust their tone of voice, using:

Tough: A *direct* argumentative tone—not meant to turn readers away from your piece but meant to suggest how urgent, important, misused, neglected your topic is.
Sweet: An *informal*, more *personal* tone that is meant to establish a personal connection to your audience—that wishes to be conversational, possibly emotional.
Stuffy: A *formal*, *businesslike*, or *professional* tone—perhaps a more "academic" tone—a tone that is careful to address the topic with objectivity and the audience with formal respect and that is careful to include sufficient elaboration of points.

Tool Kit Item 4
Practical Guide Sheet
Questions to Help Students Develop Reasons and Examples

For effective teaching of a preliminary lesson on the need for reasons and examples, we teachers do not want to be in the position of haranguing student writers with remarks such as "Don't forget to add reasons!" or "Many of you are not including examples!" Rather, we can teach the need for reasons and examples by simply becoming effective in our inquiries with the students about their early freewriting and drafts.

These questions are for coaching purposes—by the teacher or other students. Therefore, they should be asked out of genuine curiosity, in a conversational and an inquiring way. They should not be asked as interrogation or negative judgment.

How?

- How is this wrong? How does it work in a wrong way?
- How did you discover that this needed to be changed?
- How would things work if they were right?
- How did you come to believe what you believe about this?
- What came first, second, third?

Why?

- Why do you believe this is wrong (or needs to be changed)?
- Why do you think things would be better if changed in a certain way?
- Why is it that people do not make the change you seek?
- Why is that wrong?

What?

- What is one time when you experienced or observed the wrong or right thing?
- What happened wrong that made you feel the way you do about this?
- What exactly is wrong with the way things are?
- What would it look like if things were changed so that they were right?
- What is one time you experienced or observed this?

Appendix B

ACES
Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) Questionnaire, Finding your ACE Score

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household **often** ...

   Swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?
   or
   Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?
   Yes No

   If yes enter 1 _____

2. Did a parent or other adult in the household often ... Push, grab, slap, or throw something at you?

   or
   Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured? Yes No

   If yes enter 1 _____

3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you ever...

   Touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?
   or
   Try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you? Yes No

   If yes enter 1 _____

4. Did you often feel that ...

   No one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?
   or
   Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other? Yes No

   If yes enter 1 _____

5. Did you often feel that ...

   You didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you?
   or
   Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you needed it? Yes No

   If yes enter 1 _____

6. Were your parents ever separated or divorced? Yes No

   If yes enter 1 _____

7. Was your mother or stepmother:

   Often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?
   or
   Sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?
   or
   Ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife? Yes No

   If yes enter 1 _____

8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street drugs? Yes No

   If yes enter 1 _____

9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide? Yes No

   If yes enter 1 _____

10. Did a household member go to prison? Yes No

    If yes enter 1 _____

    Now add up your "Yes" answers:

    _____ **This is your ACE Score**

Appendix C

Essay—Mama, the Calico Cat

There is an argument among modern scientists about how much animals think, about how much they understand and feel. It is often seen as scientific to proclaim that animals feel little, and we just project our feelings onto them. But there is much we don't understand about the subtle world around us.

One Native American cosmology story has it that wolves and humans were created at the same time and placed together so that the wolf could protect and care for the human until the human grew stronger. According to this tale, wolves and humans now travel separately, but it is still true that they are bonded, and whatever happens to one will at some point also happen to the other

Mama, the calico cat, came to us as a skin-and-bones stray one winter day nineteen years ago. She and I developed a Zen-like relationship. When I was reading in the swivel rocker, Mama might be sitting on the back of it, licking my bald head, like I was a big cat that she loved. When Mama walked across the room, I might sweep her up, nuzzling her into my neck, like she was a little human that I loved.

However, during that first year or two of her life, Mama was just a stray cat in the mangy neighborhood we lived in. She found a way into a neighbor's ramshackle garage, and I would see her coming and going. She was so scrawny I put cat food on the ground for her near the steps of our small back deck.

Soon, she spent most of her time hanging around our place, waiting for me. Seeing her on my back deck when I got home from work was like confirming that the relatives had not gone home yet. It was like, there's your old Uncle Barney, and you think, *Doesn't he have somewhere to go, something to do?* But you know he doesn't really have anywhere to go, and besides, he needs a friend.

Even after we took her into our house, I tried for about a year to give her away—until one day. My brother had been visiting us with an acquaintance of his, Jimmy. Among other reasons, Jimmy was visiting because he was a candidate to take Mama home with him—he knew we were trying to give her away. My brother had warned me that Jimmy was a bit different and hard to get along with.

There came that moment, then, shortly before their departure, when Jimmy—obnoxious Jimmy, as I had come to think of him—was trying to see if he wanted to take the calico cat home. Suddenly, I realized (and my mind went a little worried on me) that Jimmy might not be just right for this cat. In a little while, I found myself glad when he rubbed his beard and said, "Nope, I guess it wouldn't be fair to her or me to take her home when I'm not sure I want her."

That's okay, I thought, *because you've shown me you don't see—she's got nothing but sweet bones in her body and sweet intentions toward the world*. We never offered to give Mama away again. I can't point to the moment when she went from being that dumb stray cat to a valuable jewel of the cat world, but I do know we humans do not entirely control such things.

There are three things you should know to appreciate Mama. First, Mama got what Mama wanted. Second, Mama was amazingly resilient. And, third, she knew in a deep place within that she had become my great friend.

We had three cats, but Mama was the oldest and toughest. When Mama came into the room, she brought me a sunny day, but, for the other cats, she definitely brought overcast skies. The first bowl of food put down was Mama's. Cats and people knew this. If she didn't like where one of the other cats was sitting or lying, she'd just swipe at them with a front paw repeatedly until she had moved them to where she wanted them to be. She wasn't bigger than they were, but she was the alpha.

When her special food and water bowl in our bedroom needed to be refilled, she sprawled out conspicuously beside them, in a dead-cat pose that was hard to overlook. And as the bowls were filled, she paced around purring noisily.

Mama's resilience and patience were shown by how long she waited to be allowed into our house. However, there's another story that shows it too.

Mama was the cat about whom the line "Curiosity killed the cat" was written. If you opened the clothes dryer, she hopped in. If you opened a house door, she hopped out. I think she almost got killed from this habit when she went missing for a month. Of course, we called and called her, and we went searching through the lakeside neighborhood, daily at first.

After about a month, I had a dream. Mama came galloping toward me across a field—healthy and whole. Her gait rolled along easy and free, as if striding toward something, not bolting away from something. Her three colors of white, orange, and black swirled in movement like a Picasso painting of a cat. I seemed absent from this picture, but I sensed I stood at the edge, waiting where I anticipated Mama's arrival. In my dream, I could almost feel my heart race, and my dizzying, light-headed sense of elation at seeing her.

I realized when I woke up that this dream paralleled a popular television commercial in which a young man and woman loped in romantic slow motion toward one another across a green field. But I also thought I knew what the dream meant. I said to my wife at breakfast, "Last night, I think Mama was allowed to come and say, 'Goodbye.'"

The very next evening, we arrived home about 10:00 p.m. from a movie night, and there, on the railing of our back deck, was Mama. Of course, I immediately let her in the house. In the inside light, I could see she might have lost half her weight. I put down dry food for her, and she went to it, but she didn't seem to think she could eat it. So, I put down a dish of water. She at first lapped at it tentatively and then drank it up. She probably had been shut away in someone's shed or garage. Maybe they finally returned. Who knows what scraps, bugs, or rodents had kept her alive until then. But here she was, and she was going to make it.

Often, I would sweep Mama up into my arms and hug her close to my cheek. Always, when I did this, she would immediately settle against my chest and begin to purr. Usually, she then stretched up, touching her nose to mine, like a little kiss. When I put her back down on the floor, she would look backward over her head at me, seeking one more pat, which I always gave. One time when I did this, a visitor at the time said, "You're so sweet to Mama."

Sometimes, it is when you say something that you realize it is true. That's how it was when I told our friend, "I don't do this for her; I do it for me."

My mother had died not long before Mama's arrival, and because of what we'd named our cat, I got to say the word "Mama" over and over each day, endearingly, reproachfully, joyfully. "Hello, Mama." "Mama, come here." "Mama, what a sweetie you are." In the following years, a brother and a sister of mine also died. Mama was there to comfort me. When I broke my foot and had surgery, Mama slept each night at the end of my bed with a front paw draped over my cast.

Often, it was clear what Mama felt. At bedtime, Mama would come trotting in from wherever she had been in the house. She would hop up on the bed, step over my upper body and onto my pillow, shift around until her head faced my feet, then stretch to lie down—her face next to mine, her shoulder and ribs leaning lightly against my jaw, her soft fur nestled in beside my cheek, her front feet placed on my chest. Her purr would start its steady putt-putt like a quiet-running motorboat. She would lie there, as if waiting. I would pat her with my hand, stroking slowly along her back. She would stretch out further, snuggling closer, as her purring continued. In five or ten minutes, when she considered that I had been tucked in, she would be up and gently off to some other spot in the house.

When she was twelve, we discovered that Mama had feline HIV. Some cats live a good life for up to five years with this condition, but we knew then her days were numbered. No humans have ever caught their cat's HIV, so we also knew we wouldn't catch it from Mama. After five more good years, at age seventeen, Mama had a near-death experience. As usually happens with feline HIV, one day her sneezy and runny nose suddenly roared through her system, producing complete overflowing congestion. When I hauled her out of her cat carrier, I said to the vet, "I think we have a dying cat here."

Dr. Margaret said, "I agree, and I think she's suffering."

"We would like Mama to die at home," I proposed.

And, after a short pause, Dr. Margaret replied, "I think Mama would appreciate that."

Then came a nine-day vigil, just two weeks before Christmas. Mama spent most of her time in a corner of our bedroom closet, mucous running thickly from her nose, trying hoarsely to breathe. We had gotten her water through an IV in her last trip to the vet. But since then, she neither ate nor drank. Several times a day, my wife or I would crawl into the closet beside her or to her other spot behind the chair and pet her slowly, saying, "It's okay to go, Mama. You have led a full life. You have loved us so well."

Still, she refused the droppers of anesthetic intended to ease her passing, fiercely turning her head from side to side—like a child rejecting medicine. But she did allow me to give her drinks of water by thoroughly wetting a paper towel and squeezing it gently against her mouth.

Then, lo and behold, one day she got up from the closet and walked over to her bedroom dishes and stood by them as if contemplating. Soon, she was lapping up a few mouthfuls of water. And pretty soon after that, she was eating a bit. The next day, she seemed less congested. In a day or two, we took her once again to the vet, who had expected to never see her again. Mama paraded around cheerfully on the examining table. Dr. Margaret invited the other veterinarians and staff into the examining room to see the miracle.

Mama had gone from eight pounds to just under five pounds, but her chest and lungs were clear. HIV is marked, in cats as in humans, by their having no resistance, but Dr. Margaret said, in this case, Mama had willed herself to have an immune system. For more than a year, she resumed her life, greeting us with fast-paced energy when we returned from outings, sleeping in the sun nearby as we had morning coffee, purring noisily as her food bowl was filled.

But after her near-death experience Mama's orange, white, and black colors faded, like the leaves in late autumn. Over a year, she grew thinner,

became ill, and died, probably from cancer. But even near the end, she responded when I leaned over to offer her a nose kiss, and she still settled on my lap most evenings.

Little things often hold people back. But big things never held Mama back. It was she who taught me that devotion is the core of friendship. Life rarely gives you the pure, good thing. It is better at giving you the mixed and painful thing. We are meant to accept that, to be grateful for it. You use the soothing parts to heal yourself from the hurtful parts. The cherry tree blossoms on its own schedule—and, in due time, sweetness walks through the door like a cat from the cold.

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"Though life occurs in events, it must be written about in moments."

Today's youth are growing up in an age of stress and trauma, and nowhere is that more apparent than in the classroom. Absenteeism, emotional distraction, passivity, and unresponsiveness are all signs of children in need. Thankfully, it turns out that the workshop classroom, with limited but essential tuning, can be just the environment students in the grip of trauma need to become comfortable in themselves and break through into active learning.

In *The Mindful Writing Workshop: Teaching in the Age of Stress and Trauma*, Professor Richard Koch offers clear, comprehensive, guided lessons that help teachers gain the insight necessary to adapt their instruction of writing to incorporate restorative and healing practices—practices that can improve the quality of learning and writing for all learners.

Accessible, straightforward, and empowering, the approaches presented in *The Mindful Writing Workshop* will help previously indifferent or distracted students become engaged, increase their effort, deepen their resilience, and soon raise the quality of their writing, all while guiding teachers in creating a positive, collective, "doing" classroom.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Koch has taught writing at both the University of Iowa and Adrian College, Michigan, where he is currently Professor of English Emeritus. He has a secondary specialization in African American studies. He has worked with the National Writing Project for over thirty years, teaching in the Iowa Writing Project and directing the Southeast Michigan Writing Project. He has taught advanced institutes on culturally responsive teaching for the Oakland (Michigan) Writing Project.

He cowrote The Portfolio Guidebook with Jean Petterson (published by Christopher Gordon) and also published articles on teaching writing in Language Arts, English Journal, English Education, and other journals. He lives in Pittsburgh and serves on the Core Leadership of the Western Pennsylvania Writing Project at the University of Pittsburgh. He also consults with teachers and K–12 schools on all aspects of teaching writing.

ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

All photographs in this book of Mama, the calico cat (including the back cover photo with her friend and owner) are courtesy of William Pelletier, an art photographer and lover of cats who lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

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